

PRACTICAL
ASCETICS

SMITH

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PRACTICAL ASCETICS

*For the Use of Seminarians, Novices, Religious,
Priests, and the Laity*

BY

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TO AN INFIDEL," "GREAT CONTROVERSIES," ETC.

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INTRODUCTION

The need of a short practical guide for priests, seminarians, novices, religious, and laymen in the practice of ascetics has been felt for some time. Until a better work appears, this little book may serve the purpose.

There is a vast literature on ascetics. But we have needed a compendium which would prove a guide valuable even to those who had done no previous studying in the sacred science, and that would lack the bulk and terrifying erudition which mark some works.

The writer gathered the material here presented with the hope that he himself would learn to make constant use of the lessons taught. Nearly everything in the book has been drawn from the canonized saints, except for a chapter or two from therapeutic science and applied psychology.

The volume will probably be found of value not only for private reading, but also for public use in seminaries and novitiates and at retreats.

MATTHEW SMITH

Denver, Colorado

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	THE WAY OF PERFECTION THROUGH ASCETICAL THEOLOGY	1
II	THE GREAT DIGNITY GOD HAS CON- FERRED BY THE REDEMPTION . . .	6
III	NATURAL LAWS FOR BUILDING OF STRONG WILLS AND FORMING OF GOOD HABITS	12
IV	FREQUENT PRAYER AND DAILY EX- AMINATION OF CONSCIENCE A NEC- CESSARY MEANS OF PERFECTION . .	19
V	PERSISTENCY IN PRAYER TAUGHT BY JESUS CHRIST	24
VI	THE PRACTICE OF SELF-DENIAL AS A MEANS OF MASTERING MAN'S LOWER SELF	27
VII	MORTIFICATION IS OF GREAT VALUE IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH	31
VIII	FURTHER PROOF OF THE VALUE OF MORTIFICATION; HOW THE LOSS OF CHASTITY MAY BE REPAIRED . . .	36
IX	A SCIENTIFIC CURE FOR IMPURITY .	40
X	THE VALUE OF BOTH PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WORK FOR SPIRITUALITY	44
XI	SEVENTY-THREE RULES OF ST. BENE- DICT FOR ATTAINING HIGH SPIRIT- UAL GROWTH	48

CHAPTER		PAGE
XII	GROWTH IN HUMILITY AS SET FORTH IN THE RULE OF ST. BENEDICT	53
XIII	ST. TERESA'S ADVICE ABOUT FEAR OF GOD AND AVOIDANCE OF FALSE HUMILITY	59
XIV	ST. FRANCIS DE SALES' PRACTICAL PLAN FOR MEDITATION	63
XV	SEEK HUMBLE VIRTUES, NOT VISIONS NOR ECSTASIES	68
XVI	MILD BUT SURE GROWTH IN HOLI- NESS	73
XVII	DAILY EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE	79
XVIII	RECOLLECTION; AVOIDANCE OF DIS- TRACTION IN PRAYER	84
XIX	DESOLATION OF SOUL A TEST FROM GOD	89
XX	SCRUPULOUSNESS A DISEASE OF THE SOUL; PRACTICAL PLANS FOR ITS CURE	95
XXI	IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE GOD WITHOUT FAITH; HOW THIS VIRTUE CAN BE CULTIVATED	100
XXII	THE VIRTUE OF HOPE	105
XXIII	CATHOLIC IDEALS OF LOVE OF GOD AND MAN DIFFER FROM THE IDEALS OF THE WORLD	109
XXIV	PRUDENCE, JUSTICE, TEMPERANCE, AND FORTITUDE MOST PROFITABLE VIRTUES	114
XXV	ACT OF PERFECT LOVE FOR GOD WIPES SOUL CLEAN OF MORTAL SIN	118

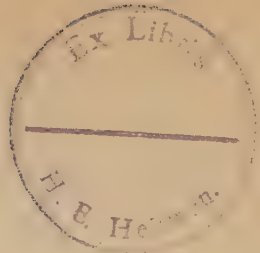
CONTENTS

vii

CHAPTER

PAGE

XXVI	PROMISES MADE BY THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS TO ST. MARGARET MARY ALACOQUE	123
XXVII	WHY THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY IS PROCLAIMED BLESSED BY ALL GEN- ERATIONS	126
XXVIII	CONDITIONS FOR DAILY COMMUNION AS OUTLINED BY PIUS X	132
XXIX	THE SPIRITUAL 'EXERCISES OF ST. IGNATIUS LOYOLA	136
XXX	THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT—AN EPITOME OF CHRISTIAN PERFEC- TION	159
XXXI	SUMMARY	187



PRACTICAL ASCETICS

CHAPTER I

THE WAY OF PERFECTION THROUGH ASCETICAL THEOLOGY

One of the great branches of ecclesiastical science is ascetical theology. By a science, we mean classified knowledge, and by asceticism, a rigid régime of self-denial and devotions, for the purpose of spiritual development. Ascetical theology is, therefore, the science that teaches us Christian perfection.

The word asceticism is taken from an ancient Greek term designating athletic practices for the development of the body; the Christian has exactly the same purpose in ascetics, only he looks to the development of the soul, not the body.

The spiritual life, like intellectual or athletic life, depends very largely on the routine used in obtaining perfection. If we follow set rules in the religious life, we advance much further than if we proceed haphazardly. A man cannot become an intellectual leader without constant study and cannot remain learned un-

less he is always reviewing. An athlete will not have perfect muscles unless he takes regular exercise, and if he stops these exercises he will retrograde. The same is true in the spiritual life. Being good is largely a matter of habit, and we form good habits by asceticism. We must always remember, however, that grace is needed in addition to our personal efforts.

Ascetical theology endeavors to lay down definite rules by which we can grow spiritually. The greatest need of the world today is to get a more spiritual outlook, and our purpose in this book is to give definite rules for the attainment of this high aim.

The first thing to remember is that we are members of a fallen race. Original sin not only took supernatural life or grace from us, but it also weakened our will, darkened our understanding, and left in us a strong inclination to evil. While we are able, through Baptism, to secure supernatural grace, the weakening of the will, the darkness of the understanding, and the strong inclination to evil remain.

God permits these effects of original sin to stay with us to remind us that we are in exile on earth and that this life is merely a probation, not our lasting end. We have a more sincere apprehension of the gravity of sin when we face the constant effects in our own lives of Adam's terrible fall. "A burned child dreads the fire," says an ancient proverb; and so it is with souls.

As a result of original sin, we meet many obstacles to perfection, and the task of asceticism is to remove these dangers or to lessen them. But the work is not merely negative. We also have the duty of imitating the positive virtues of Christ and His saints, and of becoming as like these models as we can. Christ held before His disciples the ideal of absolute perfection. He told us to be perfect, as His heavenly Father is perfect.

It is by conformity with Christ that we become perfect. While, in the present life, it is impossible to reach a stage where no further advancement is possible, ascetical writers call that person perfect who is making unending efforts to advance.

The way to obtain perfection is not merely through prayer and study, but also by self-denial. The "old man" must be put off, as St. Paul explained. Then we are to put on the new. The way is prepared for spirituality by arousing a contempt in ourselves for the pleasures of this life. This is not attained through the despising of God's gifts, for there is no such attitude in Catholicity as that of the Oriental infidel ascetics, who look upon the body as something evil, to be treated with misery in order to escape from it into Nirvana. The aim of Christian austerity is to put the body under subjection and to make its whims keep their place, instead of their reducing the whole man to slavery. The true Christian ascetic refuses to pamper the body. But he does not hate it and he expects

to have it with him after the Day of Judgment, in eternity. If the Christian denies himself certain pleasures, it is not because he despises the gifts of God, but because Christ has taught, both by word and example, that self-sacrifice is a mode of training that leads to higher spirituality. One meets many persons outside the Church who maintain that all the pleasures the world offers should be used, except when they are plainly sinful. They forget, however, that Christ on one occasion fasted forty days and forty nights and that St. Paul told the Corinthians that he chastised his body and brought it into subjection, lest while preaching to others he should himself become a castaway.

Original sin has instituted a conflict between the flesh and the spirit within us. Unless the flesh is taught to obey, it will obtain the upper hand. A parent who never teaches a child self-denial cannot expect that child, when serious temptation of the flesh comes, to win the battle. A man or woman who always pampers the flesh and who deliberately seeks to get the utmost in pleasure out of life is not going to stop when mortal sin is the penalty.

The passions must be subdued. And if this conquest takes fasting, self-flagellation, long prayers, or other sacrifice, we must be prepared to obey, if we want perfection. The whole basis of Christian life is love of God and love of fellow-man, and if love is to be so interwoven into our nature that it can

triumph despite all the obstacles placed in its path, we can rest assured that we are not going to attain this degree of heroic virtue by pampering ourselves. The sign of a perfect man or woman is instant acquiescence in duty, regardless of how difficult it is. Only intense love can make such obedience habitual.

To attain such a state of soul means that we must crucify love of earthly pleasure within us and that we must become paragons of humility. Since the world is filled with selfishness, only with the aid of grace can we conquer ourselves. We must reduce ourselves to the position of servants, be capable of withstanding the onslaughts of pride and ignorance, and, if necessary, work without any mundane recognition of our efforts. We must humble ourselves like the Divine Master. Christ is God. Yet He became man and, after harrowing experiences with the selfishness and greed of His creatures, went to death as a common criminal, out of love for us. He said that we are to take up our cross daily and follow Him. And we must not forget that to follow Him means to go to the brow of Calvary and be nailed there—left to die as outlaws.

CHAPTER II

THE GREAT DIGNITY GOD HAS CONFERRED BY THE REDEMPTION

The Catholic Church, in urging upon us the practice of ascetics, keeps before our eyes the dignity with which we have been adorned by Almighty God. She reminds us that through the application to us of the merits of Jesus Christ, won by His death on the cross, we are raised far above our natural state.

Adam and Eve, before their fall, had supernatural, preternatural, and natural gifts. They were in the state of grace and, if they had remained in this condition, would have gone immediately to heaven upon the termination of their probation. This was a supernatural state.

They were not subject to death, disease, suffering, or motions of the flesh that were not under their absolute control. This was a preternatural state.

They had all the human gifts that you and I enjoy. This was their natural state.

When they fell, they lost their supernatural status, as well as all their preternatural gifts. Their understanding was darkened and their will was weakened,

and there was left in them a strong inclination to evil; hence even their natural state was lowered.

But God did not abandon them. He promised them a Redeemer, and in the centuries that preceded the coming of Jesus Christ, men were saved by looking forward to Him and by living up to the laws that God had given to them through positive revelation and through the use of the reason with which He had endowed them. Since Christ, men have been saved, wittingly or unwittingly, through the Church by means of which He distributes the merits won by Him on the cross.

These merits are applied to us as individuals by means of grace. Grace is a divine assistance by which God raises us to supernatural life and activity and without which nothing that we could do would be worthy of supernatural reward. Without grace it would no more be possible to attain Heaven or to lay up merit there than it would be for a baby who had never been born, to live on this earth.

The two great divisions of grace are sanctifying (or habitual) grace and actual grace. By means of sanctifying grace, we are made participants in the Divine life and, if we die in this state, are absolutely sure of eternal salvation. Sanctifying grace is Divine life that is infused into our souls by God. It makes us His adopted sons. It causes sanctity, beauty, friendship with God, and sonship of God. It physically affects the soul and causes indescribable

splendor in it. It is a re-birth in God. We are born again when we come into sanctifying grace. We become the sons of God (see John i, 12).

While by nature we are God's servants, because He has created us, and by the lapse of the human race and perhaps owing to our personal mortal sins are His enemies, He makes us, by means of grace, into His dear friends.

Not content with merely making us clean, He dwells in us in a special manner when we are in the state of sanctifying grace. This presence is not only that by which He is necessarily present everywhere; it is of a special kind. He erects His throne in our souls, and adorns us as the throne room of the King should be decorated. Sanctifying grace is, however, something created. It is not "uncreated grace," by which we mean the Holy Ghost Himself. Nor is it something that surges through the soul like light in a prism. It belongs physically to the soul. It is part of it. It is a quality of the soul. But so closely related to God is it that the Scriptures speak of God as dwelling in us when we are in grace. This can be explained by the fact that the supernatural life which sanctifying grace gives us could no more be kept in our souls without the special activity of Almighty God than creation could be kept together without His constant concurrence. If He were not everywhere, creation and its continuance would be impos-

sible. If He were not in us by special activity, we could not be in the state of grace. Hence the great St. Thomas Aquinas and others, following the Scriptures, have not hesitated to call grace a participation in the Divine life. It makes us godlike.

Actual grace consists, not in this physical and habitual sanctification of the soul, but in special helps given to us by God, by means of which we are able to raise transient acts to supernatural power. If we did not have the help of actual grace, we could not make any move at all toward repentance. Even the beginning of faith would be impossible without grace. While sanctifying grace comes to us and stays in us until we drive it out by mortal sin, actual grace comes in spurts. Actual grace is given to us both before we are in sanctifying grace and afterwards.

We can lose grace and regain it. We first get sanctifying grace through Baptism, and we lose it when we commit mortal sin. Mortal sin, which is named from the Latin word for death, is the death of the soul. It drives the Divine life out of us. We drop from the supernatural state. If we die in this condition, we can no more enter Heaven than a bird can fly without wings. We lose all the merit we have gained, perhaps through years of work. But, thank God, when we are restored to friendship with Him by means of repentance, this merit revives.

Venial sin does not destroy sanctifying grace in the soul, but lessens love and weakens the soul against further assaults.

The practice of ascetics not only strengthens us against venial sin, but, if persevered in, makes mortal sin all but impossible. It brings grace and increases it in our souls. It gives us the greatest possible dignity.

"Ye shall be as gods," was Satan's snare when he tempted Eve. Through Christianity, the promise is actually fulfilled, not by the service of Satan, but by the rejection of him. By living up to the Church, we are sure of gaining Heaven, where we shall be made godlike; by the practice of ascetics, we are made certain of rising higher in eternal glory.

The Church tells us to remember that we are dust and into dust we shall return; yet she likewise teaches us that we are not brute animals, but beings created to the image and likeness of God. To encourage humility, she tells kings and emperors that they are only sinners in the sight of God, and reminds the rich that their wealth is a detriment, rather than an aid, to their salvation. To the great and powerful of the earth she says that God is no respecter of persons. But to the scrub-woman she declares: "You may be an empress in Heaven." Her Communion rail is the most democratic place on earth. The negro porter and the millionaire capitalist kneel there together, on absolute equality. An occasional clergyman may for-

get St. James' injunction to show the shabby into as good seats as those occupied by the richly-garbed; but the spirit of the Church is the spirit of Christ, and the lowliest is reminded that his chance before God is just as good as that of the great and rich, perhaps better.

The dignity of each human being is so great that if only one man had lived and sinned, God would have become man to die and save him.

CHAPTER III

NATURAL LAWS FOR BUILDING OF STRONG WILLS AND FORMING OF GOOD HABITS

While without the assistance of grace it is impossible for a man to continue long in the practice of the more difficult requirements of the natural law, and we can do nothing meriting a supernatural reward, nevertheless the person who does not use his natural powers, in addition to the strength given him by religion, often proves a failure. Grace and the supernatural presuppose nature. We must not only know how to pray and use the sacraments; but we must have sturdy will power.

Most persons of strong character use their will power without having knowledge of the natural laws. But the laws work in their case just as much as in those instances where people learn the laws and deliberately strive to follow them. In this chapter it is the writer's purpose to outline some of the fundamental natural rules for building up will power.

Self-mastery, or strong will power, largely depends on the acquirement of proper habits. By a habit we mean an action that has been indulged in often enough that it recurs with ease on our part. Some-

times it becomes so easy that it is performed without attention, sometimes even without our here and now desiring it. It follows the line of least resistance.

Our habits dominate all of us, but while, when we have formed evil habits, this natural law proves obnoxious, nevertheless in the same law we have the cure of viciousness.

If we have a bad habit, for instance that of idling, the way to overcome it is to think a great deal on the advantages to be derived from some occupation such as study, and then to start studying. The study at first may prove obnoxious, but, if it is persisted in, it will soon become habitual.

The bad habit will not give up without a struggle. But there is a point in which a balance is reached, when the preponderance of weight passes over to the side of the good habit we wish to form. One writer declares that some believe there are "definite little trails in our brains over which the life force flows as along a line of least resistance; others, that indulgence in any habit trains the brain to certain rates of vibration so that it can automatically repeat only what is habitual. But no matter what theory you may adopt to explain it, the fact remains that a great deal more force is required to undo a habit than to continue its indulgence." ¹

The young form new habits far more quickly

¹ Clare Tree Major, *How to Develop Your Will Power*, pp. 102, 103).

than the old. But the psychologist who says that the old cannot form new habits has not had much actual experience. The habits formed in childhood, when we are most amenable to influence, make the greatest impression upon us. But we can change even these. Father John X. Pyne, S.J., in his book, *The Mind*, says: "St. Ignatius Loyola was naturally of a choleric temperament and in his early years was accustomed to yield to his natural inclination. After his 'conversion' he acquired so complete a victory over his former habits that he was no longer in danger of yielding to anger. By the exercise of will, he transformed his character." (Page 334.)

If we wish to eradicate an evil habit, the best way to gain our aim is not to fight the habit so much as to substitute the opposite idea. Suppose, for instance, that we are given to the habit of easily losing our temper. If we consciously strive to be pleased by other persons, and concentrate seriously on this attempt, we will build up a habit that will displace the former one. Opposite emotions have the natural tendency to crowd each other out.

Our habits should be looked upon as our slaves. We should not allow them to make slaves of us. We have free will, and our will is supreme. It is the most powerful natural force in our lives. Few of us ever test its real strength. Sometimes, by sheer will power, men have been known to correct physical conditions that had baffled learned physicians.

Suppose a person finds great difficulty in praying. The way to cure this condition is not by stopping prayer, but by forcing himself to pray more than usual, in spite of the difficulty. Nature has a tendency to take the easiest way, and if she is forced into a channel, she follows her usual course of making that way easy to herself, that is, habitual.

With some minds, self-suggestion is useful. Emile Coué, with his "Every day in every way I am getting better and better," was merely following a well-known natural law when he suggested that his patients say this formula over and over again. Instead of habitually looking upon themselves as invalids, they formed the new habit of considering themselves improved; and the fact is that they often did improve.

If we have determined to eradicate some bad habit, we must be willing to suffer. As the habit has made the action easy for us, a new habit cannot be substituted without a struggle. We cannot make water run up hill, but we can syphon it or pump it. It will not go up of its own accord. The same truth holds with regard to habits. Once the fight starts, we should never give up. If we show weakness, the old habit will reassert itself and the battle will go against us. But every time we win a new victory, we win new strength.

A man who has been giving away to all his whims for years and who has suddenly determined to over-

come some habit of terrific force is going to find the odds very much against him. He will have a chance to succeed, but more likely he will have to overcome less drastic habits at first and strengthen his will. The mind, we must remember, is like the body. It needs constant exercise in order to be strong. If we have not been using it to our own advantage, we may have to put it through a course of training before it will respond. And because habit undoubtedly depends on the nervous system, there is particular reason for paying attention to physical laws in handling its problems. Everybody knows that if we never exercise and then try to dig a mountain away we may not progress very far. We will have to put our muscles in good condition before they will aid us much. In like manner, we also have to strengthen our nervous system by exercise.

Always keep before your mind that the way to build up will power is to make yourself do things you do not want to do. This is the first great rule. Now for others. Reuben Post Hallock, in **Psychology and Psychic Culture**, gives these rules for the formation of new habits: I. Put all the motor force possible into the actions you wish to make habitual. II. Allow as few ideas as possible of other things to hold the attention while you are laying the foundations of a habit. Will is always definite and has for its object one central idea. III. Every time there is a chance, repeat the action to be made habitual. IV. The begin-

ning of the formation of a habit is a very critical time. No exception must be allowed until the habit has gained considerable headway. V. No scheme of will culture which does not insist on deliberation is of much account. This does not mean that the same action must be repeatedly deliberated every time it comes up. One process of careful deliberation at the outset may be sufficient. (Pages 351 f.).

Tenacity of purpose and careful concentration of attention are necessary in the formation of new habits. But the late Hugo Münsterberg, the famous psychologist of Harvard University, maintained that the mere frequent performing of an action in itself is not a condition for improvement. "The individual learns only if he becomes aware of the mistakes and makes an effort to adjust the setting of his mind, that is, of his brain centers, in accordance with the results. Where this is not the case, the unsuccessful repetitions are directly destroying the desirable setting. The ideal improvement results therefore from repetitions of successful actions only. One of the consequences is that repetition is no help to the acquisition of ability as soon as a certain degree of fatigue is reached." After the habit is formed, we can go ahead with the action even in fatigue.

Dr. Münsterberg warns particularly against exceptions when we are forming a new habit. "The psychologist can give to the ambitious pupil no more earnest advice: Never allow exceptions. It is the only

way to make learning easy. As soon as a set of actions in response to a given stimulus has become habitual, every difficulty is overcome. It is the exception which interferes with this settling of habits. In a moment of laziness or indifference it may appear easier not to undertake the standardized action, but once yielding to such a feeling means to break down the connections which have been formed." (**The Acquisition of Abilities**. Published by La Salle Extension University, Chicago, Illinois.)

When the moralist warns, therefore, that being good is largely a matter of regularity and habit, he is merely following the natural law. Without Divine assistance, we could not be good for any great length of time. But it is doubtful whether God will give us grace if we do not co-operate by using common sense. Therefore, we should make habit our slave, instead of having it enslave us. We should overcome bad habits by deliberately cultivating opposite good habits. We must be willing to undergo a struggle, for the bad habit will not yield without a fight. And if we want to form a good habit, we can best do this by concentrating on the new habit and the good results we expect of it, and then by taking advantage of every opportunity to put it into practice, with never a deviation from the path we have set out for ourselves, until nature adopts the new course as its own.

CHAPTER IV

FREQUENT PRAYER AND DAILY EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE A NECESSARY MEANS OF PERFECTION

The very first point to be emphasized in upbuilding spirituality is to learn how to pray. Many of the laity who are leading good lives have never learned assiduity in prayer. This is proved by the difficulty met by men and women when they go into seminaries or novitiates, to train for the sacerdotal or religious life. Without prayer, salvation is impossible for people having the use of reason, but if a man or woman is to become deeply spiritual, the few minutes given to prayer each day by the soul that is not particularly trying to go high in heaven will not suffice. The Church, in her Canon Law, tells all her clerics to say the Rosary daily, and she compels her major order clergy, under pain of grievous sin, to say the Divine Office each day. Even priests long ordained can rarely finish this Office in less than an hour. These facts are sufficient to prove her insistence on the value of prayer.

But what of the layman? He can hardly find time

to spend a full hour in prayer. So he thinks. But the fact is that there is no layman busier than many priests who are saying their Office every day. We let ourselves off too easily when it comes to dealing with God. The layman who takes some good prayerbook, the **New Testament**, the **Imitation of Christ**, or other spiritual work and spends, say a half hour to an hour a day with it, will be able to fit it in on the busiest days. A good way to make yourself do this is to take a resolution, promising the service to God. But do not take a vow without consulting your father confessor.

One who strives after perfection should certainly not omit saying the beads daily. A plenary indulgence is now attached to recital of the beads in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. (Decree of September 4, 1927).

Ascetical theology devotes a great deal of attention, not only to vocal prayer, but also to mental. In future chapters, we will take up meditation and the other high forms of prayer. But, as this work seeks first of all to be practical, let us start with ordinary prayer, and let us first investigate what praying we must do if we are to avoid sin.

Prayer, considered in its broad sense, is the elevation of the mind to God or any pious affection towards God or the supernatural. In the strict sense, it is the asking of any fitting thing from God

(Sabetti-Barrett *Compendium Theologiae Moralis* p. 200).

Prayer is made necessary by Scriptural precept. We are told to watch and pray (Matt. xiv, 38) and: "We ought always to pray, and not to faint." (Luke xviii, 1.) Prayer is the ordinary medium ordained by God for the obtaining of necessary graces, and hence is necessary *necessitate medii* (as the theologians say).

We must pray frequently, but it is not necessary to keep it up without intermission, for this would not be possible to weak human nature. Yet since Christ Himself said that we "ought always to pray," we must give obedience. The common interpretation of His meaning is that we ought frequently to pray at opportune times, and not put off prayer because we are tired, sluggish or down-cast; also that we ought to offer all our actions to God. Such a disposition makes life a continual prayer.

If we must obtain some end and cannot procure it without prayer, to omit the prayer is sinful. One would be guilty of mortal sin by not praying at least once a year, but the Church expects us to pray every morning and evening, at least. While the omission of these morning and evening prayers would not be in itself sinful, such an omission is rarely without venial sin because of the negligence or coolness towards God that it involves.

If a person were instructed about the necessity of

prayer, and engaged in this practice only infrequently, it is very difficult to see how he could save his soul. Praying is chiefly a matter of habit. While it might be difficult at first to spend a long time at prayer, the practice has consolations of its own that well repay the effort. The wise man of earth who wishes to build up a fortune usually does it by saving and then taking advantage of his savings to make profitable investments. The same principle holds true with supernatural treasure. It is by piling up little prayers and good deeds that we gain a wealth of grace, which induces God to put greater opportunities for growth in spirituality before us.

In addition to prayer, other things must be learned by the man seeking perfection. He must make frequent use of Confession and Communion. He must pay attention to the general and particular examination of conscience. He must cultivate eager devotion to the Sacred Heart, Blessed Virgin, and the saints and angels. He must practice self-denial. He must love work. He must appreciate the spiritual value of suffering. And he must strive for a universal mastery of the virtues.

The daily examination of conscience is encouraged. The general examination of the ascetic covers not only all deliberate sins, but even the half-voluntary faults or the little negligences that detract from perfection. The particular examination does not extend to all failings, but gives attention to one fault or one

virtue, with the determination to discover our frequency in it if it is a fault, and to study our chances of cultivating it further if it is a virtue.

But the basis of a spiritual life is prayer.

CHAPTER V

PERSISTENCY IN PRAYER TAUGHT BY JESUS CHRIST

Jesus Christ Himself is authority for the fact that if we want something very badly, and keep praying for it after we have seemingly been rebuffed, we stand an excellent chance of getting it. He practically tells us to try tiring God out, figuratively speaking.

While He was praying, one of His disciples came to Him and asked Him to teach His followers how to pray, as John had done with his disciples. The Master gave them the Lord's Prayer as we find it in Luke xi and then gave the following instruction on the value of persistent prayer: "Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight, and shall say to him: Friend, lend me three loaves. Because a friend is come off his journey to me, and I have not what to set before him. And he from within should answer and say: Trouble me not, the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. Yet if he shall continue knocking, I say to you, although he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend; yet, because of his importunity, he will rise and give him as many as

he needeth. And I say to you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. And which of you, if he ask his father bread, will he give him a stone? or a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he reach him a scorpion? If you, then, being evil, know how to give the good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from heaven give the good spirit to them that ask Him?"

The fact that Jesus gave this talk immediately after He had taught the Lord's Prayer to the disciples is taken as a proof that we must seek His help by persevering and confident prayer if we are to fulfill God's precepts and counsels and to get whatever we need in life. Every one who has the proper dispositions and asks for things not opposed to God's glory or the petitioner's own spiritual welfare is sure of being heard.

When we consider the parable of Christ, the story of the Indian woman in the famous novel **Ramona**, by Helen Hunt Jackson, in which the following occurs, is by no means absurd: The woman's baby is dying and she is praying for its recovery; taking the statue of the Infant Jesus out of the arms of the statue of the Blessed Virgin, she tells Mary, in full faith, that she intends to keep her Child from His mother until her own baby is returned.

Some persons may laugh at faith of this kind.

But let them meditate upon what Christ said of the importunate man who knocked so long at his neighbor's door at midnight that the master had to arise and give him the bread he wanted in order to be rid of him.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRACTICE OF SELF-DENIAL AS A MEANS OF MASTERING MAN'S LOWER SELF

Self-denial is one of the most important features of spiritual development. Only by this can the senses be kept from domineering over us and bringing about our ruin.

Our cravings must be frequently warred upon without mercy. The passions are extremely useful to us, and the warfare does not consist in trying to extinguish them, but in keeping them in their proper channels.

Scholastic philosophy enumerates the following passions: Love, hatred, desire, horror, joy, sadness, hope, despair, boldness, fear, and anger.

Following St. Thomas Aquinas, we hold that the passions are part of human nature. They are in themselves indifferent and receive their moral character from what we do with them, since they can be used for either good or evil. A man with strong passions can, if he keeps them under control, use them for lofty purposes. Love, instead of being killed, is turned from selfishness to love of God and love of neighbor;

hatred, instead of seeking damage to our neighbors, is turned against sin; desire, instead of being directed towards self-gratification, is aimed toward spiritual treasure; horror, instead of being an abhorrence of the higher life inspired by the allurements of the world, the flesh, and the devil, is turned to a detestation of what degrades; joy is turned to the spiritual, sadness is directed toward penance for sin, hope is made into a trust in God instead of in creatures, despair is checked and made penitential, not hopeless, while boldness is made fortitude and zeal for God, fear is directed towards anxiety over God's justice, and anger is directed against evil, while the sinner himself is loved.

The passions are not sickness and neither are they harmless, as false schools of thought would have us believe. Because we belong to a fallen race, the propensity towards evil that is in us as a result of original sin makes itself very evident in their workings, but we know positively from revelation that no temptation is ever greater than we are able to withstand. Both the will and the sensual appetites of men feel the conflict within us as a result of Adam's fall and it often seems as if there are two creatures inside us, each fighting for the mastery. The only way to make sure that the higher part of us will gain the victory is by giving it plenty of exercise, just as an athlete who wants to win a prize-fight or Marathon race must make constant use of his muscles if

he is to gain the victory. Both the physique and the spirit demand exercise if they are to triumph.

Ascetical theology recognizes two kinds of mortification—exterior and interior. Exterior mortification is the voluntary sacrifice of sensuality and the senses. It goes further than keeping out of sin. It even forbids us the use, at times, of what is fully lawful, just as an athlete keeps from certain foods that would not shorten his life in the least and yet might keep him from attaining the peak of physical accomplishment. Interior mortification humiliates and brings into subjection the faculties of the soul—intellect, will, and memory—and also the passions and imagination.

There is never an attempt, however, to stifle the natural faculties. The whole idea is to direct them into the proper channels. If a nun takes the vow of obedience and puts herself under the command of her superior in all that is not sin, it is not with the intention of slaying her will power, but of making the will subject to herself, so that she can aim it at higher things, instead of having it occupy itself with the trivialities of time. A man who would eat nothing but cake would soon ruin his stomach and would have difficulty sustaining life; in like manner, a soul that delights in the sweetness of this earth ruins itself and, unless it takes a different attitude, is soon incapable of standing the strong spiritual food it needs.

Ways to train the exterior senses are: to abstain

from eating things we like, to mortify our taste for drinks, to fast, to keep away from spectacles that will please the sight, to refrain from enjoyable conversation, and so forth. These things need not be done constantly. But we will train ourselves if we do them every now and then.

Ways to train our interior selves are by forcing the intellect to delve into difficult things, instead of what is merely enjoyable; by not insisting upon having our own way so much as customary, in order to check the will; by deliberately forcing the imagination into other channels, particularly when there is danger of temptation; and by training the memory through deliberately banishing from present thought what might prove trivial or dangerous.

Always we must keep in view that the idea of ascetics is not only to avoid sin, but also to discipline ourselves by keeping from things that are ordinarily lawful.

CHAPTER VII

MORTIFICATION IS OF GREAT VALUE IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH

The value of mortification in attainment of spiritual growth was taught by Christ and His Apostles, especially St. Paul. Christ said that if any one wished to come after Him, he was to deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Him. By this denial, He meant active mortification. By taking up one's cross daily, He meant the patient suffering of trials.

Mortification means to practice penance from religious motives; to deaden unlawful desires by religious discipline; or to build up reserve strength of the will by deliberately making ourselves do things that, in themselves, are not pleasurable.

Man must depend upon grace or the supernatural assistance of God for the accomplishment of anything that is worthy of eternal reward. Without grace he "can do nothing." But he also has free will and it is important to give the will rigorous training. The supernatural is built upon nature and presupposes it. A man who pays no attention to the development of will power is not going to progress very far

in the spiritual life. This must not be understood as minimizing in any sense the dependence we must place upon grace. Will power alone would not win us even the beginning of grace. But as God has made us with free will, He expects us to meet Him part way. There is no room in Catholic theology for theories that say salvation is forced on us. Parents who imagine that because a boy goes to church frequently and says his prayers he is without the least danger, while they never make any endeavor to train his will and to make him master of himself by teaching him obedience to his superiors or self-denial, must not be surprised if he turns out a failure. To hold theories adverse to this is to draw dangerously near the heresy of Martin Luther, who taught that if you believed firmly you would be saved, even though you sinned stoutly. We hold that both grace and will power are needed.

The word mortification comes from St. Paul, who uses it to express the analogy it gives us of Christ's death to a mortal life and resurrection to an immortal one. We too are encouraged by ascetics to put the "old man" within us to death and to have the "new man" rise. "If you live after the flesh," says St. Paul in Romans viii, 13, "you shall die, but if through the spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live."

In Galatians v, 24, the same Apostle declares that those who are Christ's crucify their flesh with its

vices and concupiscences. By concupiscence, we mean any desire, the object of which appeals to a sense.

St. Paul, in II Corinthians iv, 10 f, speaks of "bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies. For we who live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake; that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our mortal flesh." His teaching, therefore, is that mortification leads to Divine life in us. It is not much wonder that we find the saints of all ages assiduous in its practice.

St. Paul thought that physical penance was probably necessary to his own salvation, and we ought to take his words to our own hearts, when he says: "I chastise my body, and bring it into subjection: lest, perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway." (I Cor. ix, 27.)

The purpose of mortification, however, is not simply to train our wills and to obtain command over our senses. One of its chief aims is to satisfy for the temporal punishment due for sin. When God forgives a mortal sin, He always takes away the eternal punishment that we would otherwise have to undergo for it, but He does not always remove the temporal punishment. The temporal punishment is a penalty that we have to suffer either here on earth or in purgatory, and very probably also in hell in addition to the eternal punishment, if the sin remains unfor-

given. God's justice demands an accounting for sin and He is by no means unjust to us in allowing this temporal punishment to remain. He shows His mercy by this punishment, for the suffering brought by sin is likely to make us cautious and guard us against falling anew. Temporal punishment is specifically mentioned in various Scriptural passages, a classical text being that of the prophet Nathan to David: "The Lord hath taken away thy sin; nevertheless, the child that is born to thee shall surely die." (II Kings xii, 13, 14.) The curse of original sin, which makes us liable to death and suffering even after the sin has been forgiven in Baptism, is also a strong proof of temporal punishment. Although, by means of Baptism or a plenary indulgence or an intense act of perfect contrition, we can escape the temporal punishment due for our actual sins, we can never on this earth escape the penalty of original sin, which afflicts the race.

While the Atonement of Christ offered adequate satisfaction for innumerable worlds, owing to His infinite merit, nevertheless He requires that we should conform with Him and suffer with Him. "If we suffer with Him, we shall also be glorified with Him," says St. Paul (Romans, viii, 17). The same Apostle tells the Colossians: "I fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ." (i, 24.) The only reason why anything can be wanting in Christ's sufferings is because the economy of God

demands something on our part as well as on His. He will not force us into heaven. As St. Augustine said, He made us without our co-operation, but will not save us without it.

CHAPTER VIII

FURTHER PROOF OF THE VALUE OF MORTIFICATION ; HOW THE LOSS OF CHASTITY MAY BE REPAIRED

The first reason why we should practice mortification is because of the rebellion in our flesh owing to original sin, which can be made very much less severe by our penance. The flames of the flesh as a result of our actual sins also succumb to this treatment.

The second reason is because we are in debt against God as a result of our actual sins and, inasmuch as we sin with both the soul and body, it is fitting that the body should be deprived of pleasure by mortification, just as, if we were damned, it would, after the Day of Judgment, be compelled to suffer with the soul.

The third reason, and one of the chief, is that since Christ suffered so much for us, although He was altogether innocent, we should strive to conform ourselves to Him and undergo volunteer penances in our own or others' behalf, joining these penances with the satisfaction He made for the human race. An added reason is to make ourselves conform to

Mary, who was spotless and yet voluntarily became Our Lady of Sorrows.

A great deal of the suffering we experience on this earth is brought about by punishment for our sins. If we volunteer to undergo suffering, spiritual writers tell us, we will have less to go through than we will if God sends us pains that are involuntary so far as we are concerned. The bearing of trials with patience is a great virtue; but it is better for us if we voluntarily practice penance. One of the most austere lives ever led was that of St. Peter of Alcantara, but when he appeared in glory to St. Teresa of Spain after his death, he cried out: "O happy penance!" God had paid him many fold for the difficulties he had willingly undergone.

With some, life is a constant fight against impurity. Others are troubled only lightly by this temptation. But those who must wage the battle have one of their chief weapons in voluntary penance.

St. Alphonsus de' Liguori, a Doctor of the Church, one of the greatest moral theologians who ever lived, agrees with St. Augustine that seldom is a victory gained over the vice of impurity. But he hastens to add: "It is because the means by which it may be gained are seldom made use of. These means are three, according to Bellarmine and masters of a spiritual life: fasting, the avoidance of dangerous occasions, and prayer.

"I. By fasting is to be understood especially morti-

fication of the eyes and of the appetite. It is said that from her very childhood the modesty of the Blessed Virgin was such that it filled every one who saw her with astonishment.

"II. The second means is to fly the occasions of sin: 'He that is aware of the snares shall be secure.' (Prov. xi, 15.) Mary fled as much as possible from the sight of men; and therefore St. Luke remarks that in going to visit St. Elizabeth, 'she went with haste into the hill country.' An author observes that the Blessed Virgin left St. Elizabeth before St. John was born, as we learn from the same Gospel, where it is said that 'Mary abode with her about three months, and she returned to her own house. Now Elizabeth's full time of being delivered was come, and she brought forth a son' (Luke i, 56). And why did she not wait for this event? It was that she might avoid the conversations and visits which would accompany it.

"III. The third means is prayer. 'And as I knew,' said the Wise Man, 'that I could not otherwise be continent except God gave it . . . I went to the Lord and besought Him' (Wisd. viii, 21). The Blessed Virgin revealed to St. Elizabeth of Hungary that she had no virtue without effort and continual prayer. St. John Damascene says that Mary 'is pure and a lover of purity.' Hence she cannot endure those who are unchaste. But whoever has recourse to her will certainly be delivered from this vice, if

he only pronounces her name with confidence.

"O Mary, O most pure dove, how many are now in hell on account of this vice! Sovereign Lady obtain for us the grace always to have recourse to thee in our temptations, and always to invoke thee, saying, 'Mary, Mary, help us.' Amen." (*Glories of Mary*, pages 177, 178, Benziger edition, 1902.)

Another precious gem of advice about the value of Mary's aid in making us chaste is given by St. Alphonsus in the same book: "St. Peter Chrysologus says 'that the name of Mary is an indication of chastity,' meaning that, when we doubt as to whether we have consented to thoughts against this virtue, if we remember having invoked the name of Mary we have a certain proof that we have not sinned." (153, 154.)

Since penance promotes chastity, truly it is of priceless value.

CHAPTER IX

A SCIENTIFIC CURE FOR IMPURITY

Fasting is one of the cures for impurity because it has physical as well as spiritual reaction upon us. Impurity attacks the body and robs it of strength that it should have for its proper development. It also concentrates poison in the system. Fasting eliminates this poison and at the same time strengthens the will to help us avoid future temptations.

A diet will enable a determined person to overcome serious and constant temptations or sins against purity. This régime of eating is intended, at first, to eliminate poisons from the body, and afterwards to strengthen it. The diet is merely an adaptation of the age-old rule of fasting. Let it be understood in the first place that it is rigorously penitential.

Following is a suggested dietary: For two weeks—**Breakfast:** Fresh fruits such as oranges, apples, pears, grape-fruit, etc.; celery and lettuce. No bananas. **Luncheon:** Tomatoes or lettuce and some lightly-boiled eggs. **Dinner:** Stew made of fresh garden vegetables without meat (the

liquid in which the vegetables have been cooked to be eaten also). The vegetables are not to be starchy.

For the next two weeks—**Breakfast**: Any fresh fruits except bananas. **Luncheon**: Fresh vegetable stew, non-starchy and without meat. **Dinner**: Fresh vegetable salad, without salad dressing, except perhaps lemon juice.

For the next two weeks: **Breakfast**, as before. **Luncheon**: Vegetables either cooked in a stew without meat or made up into a raw salad. Some protein food can be introduced at this meal, like chicken, eggs, or cheese; but only one kind should be taken and the diet should vary from day to day, for several days running. **Dinner**: Vegetable salad or vegetable stew, differing from what was chosen for luncheon (no starch foods).

For the next two weeks—**Breakfast** and **luncheon** the same as before. **Dinner** the same as before, with the addition of one of the following starch foods: baked potatoes, fresh sweet corn, butter beans, bran, whole wheat bread with butter; also some sweet fruit such as raisins, dates, figs.

For the next two weeks—**Breakfast** the same as before, with the addition of buttermilk or sweet milk. **Luncheon** the same as before, but the protein food (one kind only) can now be steak or beef if desired. **Dinner**, same as before.

In connection with this diet, which will be found beneficial in many ways, one should cultivate the habit of daily cold baths. If a man takes a cold plunge in a full bathtub immediately upon arising, or stands under a cold shower, he will experience an exhilaration that will soon make the practice a pleasure instead of a difficulty. A daily cold bath is one of the greatest health-creators known. *Alter quidem habitus valde commendabilis est genitalium scrupulosa munditia. Oportet est haec quotidie sordibus mundari.* Dirt brings temptation. Another essential is daily exercise of the upper and lower body.

While the treatment is under way, the bowels should be kept open and should be moved, if possible, several times a day. If they do not move of their own accord, an enema should be used once a day. Pills and drugs should be avoided except under a doctor's orders. If one's health is not sturdy, a doctor's advice should always be sought before one goes on a diet.

The diet we have outlined is by no means used only for the cure of concupiscence. It is a standard one used for cleansing the body of poisons; hence if the reader happens to be around when somebody is using it, he should not jump to false conclusions.

Theologians recognize that some persons find it extremely difficult to avoid pollutions. If the willingness to have them is absent, there is no sin.

In many cases, self-abuse or sins with others can be cured by concentrating the mind with intensity on spiritual affairs. But in serious cases, a diet coupled with cold baths, scrupulous cleanliness, avoidance of the occasions of sin, and prayer will work miracles.

A little dieting on this earth is preferable to an eternity in hell.

CHAPTER X

THE VALUE OF BOTH PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WORK FOR SPIRITUALITY

Believing in an old adage that says "the devil finds employment for idle hands and brains," the Church has always insisted, in ascetic theology, upon the value of labor. St. Benedict of Nursia taught his monks "to labor and to pray," if they wanted to advance in spirituality. The advice is followed in all the religious orders, because when they drop hard work decay has set in. The Catholic sisterhoods usually keep their members working from morning until night, with just a minimum of time for recreation. The writer knows nobody else who works harder than nuns. St. Basil held that piety and the avoidance of labor are irreconcilable in the Christian ideal of life.

In pagan days, certain kinds of work were held in disrepute. The dignity of manual labor was always recognized in the true religion, even before Christ, and every Jewish boy had to learn a trade. Because God Himself, when He became man, lived for years as a humble carpenter, manual labor has been held in

the highest regard by the Church. All the Apostles were chosen from among men who worked with their hands, and St. Paul, even as a Bishop, generally earned his own living by weaving tent cloth. The Blessed Virgin Mary was, on this earth, content to remain a housewife, who did her own work and looked after the domestic needs of her husband and Son. St. Joseph was an ordinary carpenter. With such models, the Church cannot do anything else except regard manual labor in the highest esteem.

As for mental work, the Church stands as the greatest civilizer of the ages, which would be impossible without scholarship. St. Francis de Sales declared that an ignorant priest does more harm than a bad priest, and it is a fact of history that one of the chief causes of the Reformation was that the Black Plague, which took a terrible toll among the people of the late middle ages and worked particular havoc among the clergy because the priests went so bravely into danger to care for the dying people, reduced the ranks of the clergy and caused the authorities to raise to the priesthood many ill-instructed men, who brought a large section of the hierarchy into disrepute. The Wicliffe and the Lollard movements, forerunners of the Reformation, were largely the outgrowth of clerical ignorance, for basically they were not founded so much on displeasure with the teachings of the Church as on grievances against the clergy. In our own day, one of the chief reasons why

so many Italians are cool towards the Church is because, a generation or so ago, there was carelessness about the amount of education required for the clergy, owing to the difficulties undergone by the Church in the collapse of Papal temporal power. Ignorant clergymen bring spiritual ruin to the people, and the Church, having learned her sorrowful lesson, is extremely strict in regard to the amount of training she demands for her priests.

If ignorant clergymen can work such havoc, it stands to reason that an ignorant layman can do likewise, when he happens to hold a position in society where people expect him to give an intelligent explanation of that for which he stands. He must read. He must attend instructive sermons. And he will not advance far in spirituality unless he does these things.

Conditions are entirely different now than they were when illiteracy was necessarily widespread, before printing was invented or was brought into universal use. In our day, the man who refuses to use his brain in the service of God can hardly expect to advance in virtue, if his position demands intelligence.

The man who works with his hands or with his brain out of love for God is sure to obtain a great reward. The father who is compelled to spend many hours toiling for the sake of his family can rest assured that, by this labor, he is winning a higher

place in heaven, if he has the proper dispositions. The scholar who denies himself other pleasures in order to obtain learning for the sake of the Church is also going to receive a great reward for his work. St. Alphonsus de' Liguori so esteemed the necessity of work and prayer for those who aim at high spirituality that he made and kept a vow never to waste a moment of time.

CHAPTER XI

SEVENTY-THREE RULES OF ST. BENEDICT FOR ATTAINING HIGH SPIRITUAL GROWTH

The Rule of St. Benedict of Nursia, founder of the Benedictine Order, a society that has existed for more than fourteen hundred years and has been and still is one of the greatest ornaments of Christianity, deserves study from any one who is seeking to tread the way of perfection. The following methods of spiritual growth are taken from this Rule, being somewhat adapted for the laity:

1. Love thy God with thy whole heart, thy whole soul, thy whole strength.
2. Love thy neighbor as thyself.
3. Thou shalt not kill.
4. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
5. Thou shalt not steal.
6. Thou shalt not covet.
7. Thou shalt not bear false witness.
8. Honor all men.
9. What you would not have done to yourself, you ought not to do to another.
10. Deny yourself to follow Christ.

11. Chastise the body.
12. Do not seek pleasure.
13. Love fasting.
14. Relieve the poor.
15. Clothe the naked.
16. Visit the sick.
17. Bury the dead.
18. Give help in trouble.
19. Console the sorrowing.
20. Hold yourself aloof from worldly ways.
21. Prefer nothing to the love of Christ.
22. Do not give away to anger.
23. Do not foster a desire for revenge.
24. Do not entertain deceit in your heart.
25. Do not make a false peace.
26. Do not abandon charity.
27. Do not swear, lest perchance you swear falsely.
[Remember, in this, however, that it may be a duty to swear when your own, another's, or God's honor demands it or the State justly requires it.]
28. Speak the truth with your heart and tongue.
29. Do not return evil for evil.
30. Do no injury; yes, patiently bear the injury done to you.
31. Love your enemies.
32. Do not curse them that curse you, but rather bless them.
33. Bear persecution for the sake of justice.
34. Do not be proud.

35. Do not be given to wine.
36. Do not be a great eater.
37. Do not be drowsy.
38. Do not be slothful.
39. Do not be a murmurer.
40. Do not be a detractor.
41. Put your trust in God.
42. Refer what good you see in yourself, not to yourself, but to God.
43. As to any evil in yourself, however, be convinced that it is your own and charge it to yourself.
44. Fear the Day of Judgment.
45. Be in dread of hell.
46. Desire eternal life with all spiritual longing.
47. Keep death before your eyes daily.
48. Keep a constant watch over the actions of your life.
49. Hold as certain that God sees you everywhere.
50. Dash at once against Christ the evil thoughts that rise in your heart.
51. Disclose them to your father confessor or spiritual guide.
52. Guard your tongue against bad and wicked speech.
53. Do not love much speaking.
54. Do not speak useless words and such as to provoke laughter. [Innocent merriment is not sin. But it is sometimes well to deprive ourselves of it out of austerity.]

55. Do not love much or boisterous laughter.

56. Listen willingly to holy reading.

57. Apply yourself often to prayer.

58. Confess your past sins to God daily in prayer with sighs and tears, and amend your life in the future. [This does not mean sacramental Confession, but a private acknowledgment to God.]

59. Do not fulfill the desires of the flesh.

60. Hate your own will.

61. Obey the commands of your lawful superiors in all things, even though (which heaven forbid) they themselves act otherwise than they command you, and be you in this case mindful of that precept of the Lord: "What they say, do ye; what they do, do ye not." [Remember, of course, that we are never bound to obey when ordered to sin; in fact, we do evil by then obeying.]

62. Do not desire to be called holy before you are holy; but be holy first, that you may be truly called holy.

63. Fulfill daily the commandments of God by works.

64. Love chastity.

65. Hate no one.

66. Do not be jealous. Do not entertain envy.

67. Do not love strife.

68. Do not love pride.

69. Honor the aged.

70. Love the young.

71. Pray for your enemies in the love of Christ.

72. Make peace with your adversary before the setting of the sun.

73. Never despair of God's mercy.

Every one of these suggestions is a sermon in itself. Here we have the moral law of Christ summarized, not only as to its commandments, but also as to its counsels. While these rules can be best obeyed in a religious community, they are not impossible of fulfillment in any form of life.

CHAPTER XII

GROWTH IN HUMILITY AS SET FORTH IN THE RULE OF ST. BENEDICT

St. Benedict, in his famous Rule, gave particular attention to ready obedience, reserve in speech, and humility as ways to perfection.

Ready Obedience

He said that the first degree of humility is obedience without delay. As soon as anything has been commanded by a superior, the ready obeyer permits no hesitancy in its execution, but acts as if the matter had been commanded by God Himself. Of such an obeyer the Lord has said: "At the hearing of the ear, he hath obeyed Me."

This obedience means instant quitting of your own work, and giving up your own will, and leaving unfinished what you are doing, in order to conform to Christ when He said: "I came not to do My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me."

Obedience will be acceptable to God and agreeable to men only if what is commanded is done, not

with hesitation or tepidity or murmuring, nor with an answer of unwillingness, but because obedience rendered to superiors is given to God. For Christ Himself has said: "He that heareth you heareth Me." And obedience must be given by the disciple with good will, "for the Lord loveth a cheerful giver." Obedience with an ill will, amid murmurs, not only with the lips but also in the heart, even though the command be fulfilled, will not be acceptable to God, who reads the heart of the murmurer. For such an action, there is no reward, but rather the penalty of murmurers is acquired, unless one make satisfaction and amendment.

(In reading this, remember that the saint is advising people striving for perfection. When vowed in an order, obedience even with murmuring of the heart would keep one from sin, although it would not bring highest or perhaps any reward).

Reserve in Speech

St. Benedict advised his spiritual children to do what the prophet said: "I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I have set a guard to my mouth, I was dumb, and was humbled, and kept silence even from good things."

He reminded his disciples of the other texts: "In much talk thou shalt not escape sin" and "Death and life are in the power of the tongue."

The Degrees of Humility

Recalling to his disciples that Scripture says, "Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted," St. Benedict dwelt on the necessity of humility. He analyzed this virtue into various degrees.

The first degree is ready obedience, to acquire which a man must always have the fear of God before his eyes, being mindful of His commands, considering that those who despise Him will burn in hell for their sins and that life everlasting is prepared for those who fear God. Let this man guard himself every moment against vice, namely of thought, tongue, hands, feet, and self-will, and let him also hasten to cut off the desires of the flesh. The saint reminds us that God always sees us and that His angels report to Him every hour, and the holy Benedict further urges us to turn away from our own will and follow God's, strengthening his arguments with texts, such as, "There are ways that to men seem right, and the end thereof plungeth to the depths of hell."

The second degree of humility is when a man does not love his own will, nor delights to fill his own desires, but by his deeds carries out the word of the Lord: "I came not to do My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me."

The third degree is when a man, for the love of

God, subjects himself to a superior in all obedience, imitating the Lord, of whom the Apostle said: "He became obedient unto death."

The fourth degree is when, although hard and distasteful things are commanded, and even though injuries are inflicted, they are accepted with patience and even temper, and the servant does not grow weary nor give up, but holds out, in accordance with the Scripture: "He that shall persevere unto the end shall be saved." The faithful man ought to bear all things, however contrary, for the Lord: "For Thy sake we suffer death all the day long: we are counted as sheep for the slaughter." Fulfilling the command of the Lord, these men have patience in adversities and injuries; when struck on the one cheek, they turn also the other; despoiled of their cloaks, they give also their coats; forced to go one mile, they go two; with the Apostle Paul they bear with false brethren and "bless those who curse them."

The fifth degree of humility is that which does not hide from our spiritual guides (Abbots, in the Benedictine monastery) the evil thoughts which arise in the heart or the evil committed in secret, but humbly confesses them. "Reveal thy way to the Lord and trust in Him." The reference here is not to sacramental Confession, but to extra-sacramental.¹

¹ Canon 325 of the Code of Canon Law declares: "Religious superiors are strictly forbidden to induce their subjects in any

The sixth degree is when one is content with the meanest and worst of everything and holds one's self as a bad and worthless workman, saying with the prophet: "I am brought to nothing and I knew it not: I am become as a beast before thee, and I am always with thee."

The seventh degree is when one not only declares with the tongue but in one's inmost soul believes that one is the lowest and vilest of men. "But I am a worm and no man, the reproach of men and the out-cast of the people."

The eighth degree is when a monk does nothing but that which is sanctioned by the common rule of the monastery and the example of his elders. This might be interpreted for the laic as suggesting that he quietly live a life of virtue without making himself conspicuous by startling devotions that are really publicity seeking.

The ninth degree is to withhold the tongue from speaking and to keep silence until asked to talk. "In the multitude of words there shall not want sin."

The tenth degree is when one is not easily moved to laughter. "The fool exalteth his voice in laughter."

way to manifest their state of conscience to them. The subjects, however, are not forbidden to manifest of their own free will and choice their conscience to the superiors. On the contrary, it is proper that they should approach their superiors with filial confidence, and if they are priests, reveal to them any doubts and anxieties of their conscience."

The eleventh degree is to speak gently and without laughter, humbly and with gravity, with few and sensible words, and not with a loud voice. "The wise man is known by the fewness of his words."

The twelfth degree is when one is not only humble of heart, but always lets this appear in his whole exterior to all that see him. At the work of God, in the church, in the garden, on a journey, in the field, or wherever one may be, whether sitting, walking, or standing, let such a one have his head bowed down, his eyes on the ground, ever holding himself guilty of his sins, thinking that he is already standing before God's judgment seat, always saying in his heart with the Publican: "Lord I am a sinner and not worthy to lift up mine eyes to heaven."

Such humility, promises St. Benedict, will bring us to that love of God which, being perfect, casts out fear. All that we first practiced in fear, we will now perform, as it were naturally and by force of habit, no longer from the fear of hell but from the love of Christ.

CHAPTER XIII

ST. TERESA'S ADVICE ABOUT FEAR OF GOD AND AVOIDANCE OF FALSE HUMILITY

Before almost every great undertaking for the cause of religion, a fear of unworthiness comes over the soul. Many persons who wish to become sisters or priests hesitate because they do not deem themselves worthy of the high dignity. The fact is, none of us is worthy to be a priest or bride of Christ. But Christ has deigned to call men and women to these offices and we obey in all humility.

The fear we have is sent from God Himself. St. Teresa of Spain, in the story of her life written by herself under holy obedience to her confessor, says: "When the act is done for God only, it is His will before we begin it that the soul, in order to increase its merits, should be afraid; and the greater the fear, if we do succeed, the greater the reward and the greater the sweetness that afterwards result. I know this by experience in many serious affairs; and so, if I were a person who had to advise anybody, I would never counsel any one to whom good inspirations come from time to time to resist them

through fear of the difficulty in carrying them into effect. For if a person lives detached for the love of God only, that is no reason for being afraid of failure, as He is omnipotent."

St. Teresa herself had experience with a trick that the devil often plays with good people to keep them from serving God to the utmost of their ability—false humility. She had started the excellent practice of mental prayer, to which she attributed all the extraordinary graces she received during her life. In false humility, she gave up the practice of this and all her devotions except those prescribed by the rule of her religious order, assuring herself, in supposed humility, that she was not good enough to be practicing the others. Luckily she found out her mistake in time. To keep from being virtuous simply because other men will see you is not commendable, she declares. "It seems to me that Satan has employed this artifice—and it is of the greatest service to him—that men who really wish to love and please God should hide the fact, while others, at his suggestion, make open show of their malicious dispositions."¹

The saint protested again and again, in her book, that God was conferring His graces upon one most unworthy in giving them to her, but she never tired

¹ This suggestion is not at variance with St. Benedict's eighth rule for humility, which, it seems to me, is aimed at freakish ascetism.

of warning against the false humility that makes men and women refuse to use the gifts Christ sends them. "Some think it humility not to believe that God is bestowing His gifts upon them," she says. But, she goes on to show, we can be humble simply by remembering, while we take advantage of these gifts, that God bestows them without any deserving whatsoever on our part. Nobody who reads what she has to say of herself can doubt her genuine humility. She declares in one place:

"Blessed be Thou, O Lord, who, out of a pool so filthy as I am, bringest forth water so clean as to be mete for Thy table! Praised be Thou, O Joy of the angels, Who hast been thus pleased to exalt so vile a worm!"

In her warning against false humility, it must not be understood that St. Teresa in any sense attacks true humility. Christ has told us not to let the left hand know what the right hand does, and she truly fulfilled this in her life. By false humility, we are to understand the abstention from good deeds simply because they might be seen. Christ certainly did not intend this, for He told us to let our light shine before men that they may see our good works.

The Church needs virtuous priests and sisters. A person must be willing to strive for Christian perfection if he or she aspires to the religious or ecclesiastical life. A corrupt person is not wanted. But undoubtedly there are many who are fitted for the

offices who are kept back from them by false humility and scrupulous fear.

Our humility, therefore, must be regulated, the same as everything else. The Christ who washed the feet of His disciples at the Last Supper, and who taught His followers that high position meant only the opportunity to serve; who constantly held before them the principle that humility is the way to paradise; who throughout the ages has inspired His greatest saints to be paragons of self-effacement—remember that this Christ is the same Master who taught us not to bury our talents. So let us make the most of the gifts God has given to us; but let us remember that God, not ourselves, made them. And may we ever remember that humility is merely a preparation, and that a dignity beyond our wildest hopes awaits us, if we prove faithful.¹

¹From "The Devil's Thoughts," by Samuel Taylor Coleridge:

"He saw a cottage with a double coach-house,
A cottage of gentility!
And the Devil did grin, for his darling sin
Is pride that apes humility."

CHAPTER XIV

ST. FRANCIS DE SALES' PRACTICAL PLAN FOR MEDITATION

One of the great essentials for those who wish to grow in holiness is to learn how to meditate. The plan that we will present is that of St. Francis de Sales, whose method of asceticism was arranged for those who live in the world, as ordinary laics, as well as for members of religious communities. It is eminent for its practicalness. He describes his idea of meditation in the second part of his **Philothea** or **Introduction to a Devout Life**, a book of which Pope Pius XI said in his first encyclical: "Would that this book, the most perfect of its kind in the judgment of his contemporaries, were now read by all as it was at one time in the hands of all, so that true piety might everywhere again flourish."

The first step in St. Francis' plan of meditation is to put ourselves in the presence of God. We do this by bringing ourselves to a keen and attentive realization that God is everywhere; by remembering that He is not only in the place where we are, but that He is especially in our hearts and spirits; by recalling

that Christ in His sacred humanity looks down from heaven upon all men, but especially on Christians and still more especially on those who pray; and by imagining that Christ is actually present with us as man (if the Blessed Sacrament is present, "this presence is no longer imaginary, but actual; for hidden under the veil of bread and wine the Savior is actually present, behold and watching us, although we cannot see His bodily presence.").

The second part of the plan consists in the invocation. We must humble our souls with deep reverence, acknowledging our unworthiness to approach the Sacred Majesty, but knowing that His goodness would have us draw near, and therefore asking grace to serve and worship Him in our meditation.

The third step is the setting forth of the mystery on which we wish to dwell. This consists in representing to ourselves, by the aid of the imagination, the religious mystery on which we wish to meditate, as though it were actually going on before our eyes. "For instance, if the subject of your meditation is the crucified Savior, imagine yourself on Mount Calvary, beholding and hearing all the events of His Passion; and represent to yourself all that the Evangelists describe." When we meditate on the end of creation, the excellence of goodness, and so on, we cannot employ this active imagination, but "we can certainly use similitudes and comparisons to assist our reflections." Inasmuch as there is some effort

in this, the saint suggests that we act with great simplicity and not fatigue our minds with labored thoughts, but rest content with humble means, particularly at first.

The next step in the meditation consists in the reflections. After the act of the imagination comes an act of the understanding, which is the meditation proper. It consists of one or more reflections made with a view of exciting our affections towards God and the things of heaven. The purpose is not to obtain knowledge, but to promote virtue and the love of God. If the mind obtains sufficient food in one reflection, it is well to stay with this and not go to others, "imitating the bee, which does not leave a flower until it has sucked thence all the honey." If we do not find sufficient matter in the first reflection, let us go to another, but let us act quietly and without haste.

The next step in meditation is the arousing of affections and resolutions. As good impulses are aroused by meditation, we should endeavor to enlarge and confirm them. Nevertheless, we should not be content with general desires and aspirations, but should turn them into special resolutions for our individual correction and amendment. If, in meditating on the Passion, we resolve like Christ to forgive our enemies, we should think of some particular wrongdoer whom we are willing to forgive. "In this way you will soon correct your faults,

whereas mere desires will have but few and tardy results."

The meditation is concluded with three acts, which should be made with the greatest humility. *First, we should make an act of thanksgiving to God* for giving us good desires and resolutions. *Secondly, we should make an act of oblation*, offering to God His own mercy and goodness, the Death, Blood, and merits of His Son, in union with these our own affections and resolutions. *Thirdly, we should make an act of intercession*, entreating God to give us the graces and virtues of His Son, to bless our desires and resolutions so that we may faithfully fulfill them; and further, we should pray for the Church, our pastors, relatives, friends, and all others, making use of the intercession of Our Blessed Lady, the saints, and angels, "concluding with the Our Father and Hail Mary, the universal and never-failing petition of the faithful."

Finally, St. Francis would have us "*gather a little nosegay of devotion.*"

When we walk in a flower garden, we usually gather a few choice flowers to inhale their fragrance and carry them away to enjoy throughout the day. Likewise, when our mind has fed upon some mystery by meditation, we should select a few points that especially strike us and are most likely to benefit us, and we should dwell upon them, inhaling their fragrance.

St. Francis' plan is wholly practical. It can be used on a street car rushing to work, in a few minutes taken from labor at the shop or office, while one is cooking a meal—in fact it is a path to heaven available to everybody. Why not take advantage of it? A meditative soul is never lost.

CHAPTER XV

SEEK HUMBLE VIRTUES, NOT VISIONS NOR ECSTASIES

There are some good people who, in their endeavor to be holy, are always imagining that they are having ecstasies or visions. They think that God has given them secret instructions, sometimes to the detriment of those clergymen who are following the official teachings of the Church or whose public work is guided by the accumulated knowledge of the centuries, learned in seminary days.

St. Francis de Sales, in his *Philothea* (page 112), says that ecstasies, raptures, insensibilities, impassibilities, deific unions, elevations, transformations, and similar perfections, which promise to exalt the soul to a purely intellectual contemplation, to an essential application of the Spirit, and a super-eminent life, are not virtues, but are rather the reward of virtues. They are foretastes of future bliss that are sometimes granted to men in order to kindle their longing for the perfect blessedness of paradise.

"But it is safer," he says, "not to seek such favors, which are in no way necessary in order truly to love and serve God, which should be our only aim.

Neither, indeed, can they be obtained by a labored search, since they are rather emotions than actions, which we can receive but not originate. Our aim is to become good, devout, pious men and women, and to that end we must labor; then if it should please God to give us angelic perfections, we should, doubtless, be good angels, but, meanwhile, let us simply, humbly, and devoutly practice those lowly virtues, the acquisition of which has been appointed by our Savior as our daily task, such as patience, cheerfulness, a mortified heart, humility, obedience, poverty, chastity, kindness towards our neighbor, forbearance towards his faults, diligence, and holy fervor. Let us cheerfully leave pre-eminent graces to pre-eminent souls; we do not deserve so high a post in God's service, too happy if we can obtain the humblest office in His household, whence He, in His own good time, if He sees fit, will bid us come up higher."

It is needless to tell normal people that God usually works through ordinary channels. It is exceptional when He employs the extraordinary. A saintly priest known to the writer, one who had heard far more Confessions than the ordinary priest, had studied far more theology, and had been given unusual opportunity to observe not only the souls of the laity but also those of religious and clergymen, said that in more than a quarter century's experience he had yet to find the first case of genuine visions or ecstasies among them. We can see from this that these cases

are very exceptional. No one familiar with the lives of the saints can deny that they occur; but the prudent confessor is never swept off his feet by the claim that they are happening, for the world has many people with unusually vivid imaginations, and where there is not extraordinary virtue it is very unusual for God to grant extraordinary graces. It is possible, of course.

The normal man and woman will do better to follow the advice of St. Francis de Sales than to hope to be another St. Teresa of Spain. If God wants us to be Teresas, He will make us such, but if He does and we are real saints we will find ourselves crying out with Teresa: "Seeing that He desires to plant a garden of sweet flowers on such a foul dung-hill as I am, may His Majesty grant that I may not, through My own fault, pull them up, and so become again what I was before!" (*Autobiography of St. Teresa*, chapter x.)

If there is any truth standing out above all others in the lives of the saints, regardless of whether or not they enjoyed miraculous communication with the Divinity, it is this: that sainthood comes by doing the ordinary things of life extraordinarily well. "This glorious King," says St. Francis de Sales, "does not reward His servants according to the dignity of their office, but according to the humility and love with which they fulfill that which is appointed them. . . . Undoubtedly high pretensions

are very liable to illusions, deceits, and errors, so that sometimes those who would fain be angels are not really even good men." (*Philothea*, p. 113.)

While all the ascetical works of the Church play on the harp of humility, however, and while the lives of the saints are filled with instances of their running away from honors even in the Church, we must not forget that the virtue of prudence or the willingness to work and suffer must sometimes take precedence over even humility. Suppose, for instance, that a man were well fitted for a high position and it were difficult to secure one for this particular place, as has often happened in the history of the Church. It would then seem that it would be more virtuous for the man to accept than to refuse. A man might want to dodge honors, through humility. But if he is not given to conceit and honestly knows in his heart that it is wise for him to assume leadership, the demand of service may be greater than the demand of humility. Most men going into important positions, however, if they have been in power before, know that there is more grief than joy in all of these places, if one really does one's duty, and they accept them, not with rejoicing, but with submission. A man who deliberately seeks such a position in the Church to gain prestige in the eyes of his fellows will find it a liability, not an asset, in eternity. And the man who is honest enough to look into his own heart and see that he is not fitted should be

humble enough to evade the dignity. The saints were so extraordinary in their self-inesteem that they taught a valuable lesson to self-seekers in their efforts to escape high dignity.

Sometimes laics are afraid to enter the priesthood or convent because they feel too sinful. Let them never forget that the Church encourages us all to look upon ourselves as sinners and that there is no room in Catholic theology for imagining that we are paragons of virtue. This is the chief difference between us and the sects. We admit that we are only sinners.

If a person is in the toils of a horrible vice, like impurity, which has reduced him or her to abject slavery, it is better to throw off that vice, by prayer and mortification and the sacraments, before seeking admission as a seminarian or novice. But to wait until one is an angel will be to wait until one has finished one's term in purgatory. All of us, even the best, are far from ideal on this earth. Even the great saints had their faults, despite the assertions of over-enthusiastic biographers. If you do not believe this, read the Scriptures. Only two absolutely perfect persons ever lived—Christ and Mary. Others came near the mark, but most of us fall far short of it.

CHAPTER XVI

MILD BUT SURE GROWTH IN HOLINESS

St. Francis de Sales, whose system of spiritual growth was eminently practical, taught a type of asceticism that is far more applicable to our lives than the rigorous penances of the ancient cenobites. They were saints indeed, but today the greatest saints are not those who fly off into the deserts to keep away from mankind, but those who stay in the midst of civilization, serving their fellows and also taking time to commune with God. Theologians admit a development of doctrine in the Church, that is, a better understanding of the Apostolic deposit of faith from age to age; and it would seem that we have a development of the understanding of the ascetic ideal in the practice of the Church today, which no longer urges us to go off into the deserts but promotes religious orders that combine the active with the contemplative life. No less an authority than St. Thomas Aquinas held that this combination is the highest form of life. Occasionally, one will run across an author who holds that the contemplative is the higher form. But the common sense of the Catholic public

has settled this argument. We do not wish to disparage those orders that give themselves over to contemplation almost exclusively. Theirs is a marvelous vocation, reserved for the few and to be encouraged even if it demands leaving an active order for a contemplative one. But it is our opinion that it is not as high a vocation for the average soul as the combined active and contemplative life, regardless of its higher worth for individuals called especially to it. According to the doctrine of St. Thomas, if the active and contemplative life are considered separately, the contemplative excels; but when mixed they surpass either taken separately (*Summa Theologica* II-II, q. clxxxviii, a. 6). This is also the doctrine (P. 25) of R. P. Francisco Naval, whose **Theologiae Asceticae et Mysticae Cursus** (first issued in Spanish and then translated into Latin by Father Fernandez) received a special letter of commendation from Pope Benedict XV. (See 1925 edition, Marietti, Turin.)

With this wealth of authority behind us, we need not have the least fear in following the type of asceticism of which St. Francis de Sales is the chief modern exponent. While fasting and other forms of asceticism are splendid in upbuilding spiritual life, other duties may call and the fasting may be the lesser virtue. St. Francis says: "We ought always to give the preference to those virtues which are most incumbent on us, and not to those which are most

agreeable to our inclinations. St. Paula took delight in the practice of bodily mortification, thereby enhancing her spiritual consolations; but obedience to her superior was a higher duty, and therefore St. Jerome says that she was wrong in fasting immoderately contrary to the direction of her Bishop. So the Apostles, who were commissioned to preach the Gospel and feed the souls of men with the Bread of Life, rightly judged that they must not forsake this duty in order to administer to the bodily needs of the poor, although in itself that was so sacred a duty" (Acts vi). St. Francis points out that, since every state in life has its peculiar duties, although we should practice every virtue, still we should seek chiefly to advance in those required by the state of life to which God has called us. (**Philothea**, page 106.)

A recent book of merit, written for priests' daily meditations (**At the Feet of the Divine Master**, by Huonder, S.J., put into English by Frommelt and Preuss), gives a bit of advice that is applicable to the laic or nun as well as the clergyman, when it says (page 105): "A pious active life without genuine zeal, an active bustling life without prayer and recollection—neither makes a true priest, but of the two the former is the preferable. The two must be united and formed into one harmonious whole." This statement is made at the end of a meditation on the necessity of prayer, and attention is called to the many

times when Scripture tells of Christ's going off after performing hard work to spend hours in prayer. "And having dismissed the multitude, He went into a mountain alone to pray." (Matt. xiv, 23.)

Here, then, we have the highest Catholic ideal of life: neither good works alone, nor prayer alone, but prayer and good works combined. All our modern religious orders are based on this principle. Even contemplatives like the Discalced Carmelites follow it, for the sisters, we understand, spend two hours a day writing letters of advice to troubled persons who seek this aid. The most of their day is spent in prayer.

Let no one interpret this chapter as a criticism of the ancient monks and nuns who dwelt alone in the deserts, serving God. But the Church itself plainly shows its preference for modern community life, which is a development of that ancient idea, which in itself was a development of the attempt to lead virginal lives in the bosom of one's family.

The man or woman who remains in the world to-day cannot even faintly imitate the cenobites of old. But he or she can easily imitate the modern religious. Theoretically speaking, a person who is not a religious or a bishop (the episcopacy is one of the "perfect states" of life, i. e. it gives graces which will bring perfection if co-operated with) can be more perfect, interiorly, than a religious or bishop. But the fact is that the great majority of the saints whom the Church has raised to her altar have been re-

ligious and clergymen. Nevertheless, this need not deter any layman from seeking perfection in whatever line of work he may be placed. The canonized saints include everything from beggars and soldiers to kings and queens.

St. Francis de Sales, after urging us to cultivate chiefly those virtues that mark our state in life, tells us that we should select some particular virtue at which to aim, and if we are hindered by a particular vice, we should strive so far as possible to cultivate the opposite virtue, like humility or gentleness if we are specially tempted to pride or anger.

The saint also urges us to cultivate the most excellent rather than the most showy virtues. "There are some virtues," he says (*Philothea*, 107), "which approach our senses and are, so to say, material, and are, therefore, highly esteemed and preferred by ordinary men, who will thus exalt temporal almsgiving above spiritual, or fasting, discipline, and bodily mortifications above gentleness, cheerfulness, modesty, and other acts of discipline of the heart, which are in truth greatly preferable. . . . Seek the highest virtues, not those most lauded; the best, not the most obvious; the truest, and not the most showy."

Always remember, in weighing this advice, that the Church has not receded in the least from Christ's teaching of the value to us of fasting. But we might as well be practical and admit that, with conditions

of life as they are today, fasting is possible to the very few. About the only fasting most lay Catholics do today is that demanded before Communion. A little more would be better for the health of both body and soul.

CHAPTER XVII

DAILY EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

Daily examination of conscience to record what faults we have committed and to arouse sorrow for them is one of the most recommended of Christian practices. St. Ignatius Loyola reduced this, together with other practices, to a system, in his **Spiritual Exercises**. He urged that we begin our examination by thanking God for the benefits we have received from Him; second, that we ask God for grace to know and to correct our faults; third, that we pass in review the various hours of the day, and note what faults we have committed in word, deed, thought, or omission; fourth, that we ask God's pardon for these faults; fifth, that we purpose amendment. A little consideration will show the value of this daily examination.

Occasionally, a priest meets a man or woman who claims to have difficulty thinking up enough matter to go to Confession. In one case in a million, the person may be as faultless as he claims. But in most cases, either ignorance or pride dictates the sup-

posed flawlessness. The Scriptures say that the just man falls seven times a day. We know that one needs extraordinary grace to keep from semi-deliberate venial sins. To maintain that one is perfect is to lie. St. John declares that the man who says he is without sin is a liar and the truth is not in him.

There are many persons who drink down sin like water and hardly give a second thought to their guilt. They go to Confession rarely and make the priest sweat when he tries to get them to admit a genuine venial sin in order that he may give them absolution (he cannot give it unless at least one venial sin is told). While occasionally they may be as holy as they seem, the writer doubts it. He has studied just a little too much theology and has dealt with too many people in his experience as a newspaperman to have so optimistic an outlook as theirs.

Converts coming into the Church also often claim to have difficulty thinking up enough sins to make a confession of their lives. We can allege an excuse for them. But nobody except an inexperienced person would imagine that they have been so spotlessly holy all their lives that they have not been guilty of the ordinary round of faults. The truth is, their spiritual training has been so meagre that they have been drinking down constant venial sin without remembering it. After they have been in the Church a while, their consciences become used to the Catholic

attitude and they have no more difficulty in making their Confessions than the normal Catholic.

The ordinary Catholic, although leading a good life and regularly receiving the sacraments, usually has no difficulty finding enough matter to make a weekly Confession. Unless he is leading a very inactive life, it is not necessary for him to be going into the tale of previous Confessions to get sufficient matter by repeating what he has told before.

All this may seem strange to some people. But if it is, they had better study up their religion a little, for they cannot pretend to be leading better lives than the class we have just described, or lives nearly as good.

The great saints found a daily examination of conscience valuable, and if we claim that we do not need it we are nonsensically pretending to greater virtue than theirs.

The reader will understand that when I speak of faults I am not dealing with serious sins, such as willing offenses against the sixth commandment or serious injustice to our neighbors. I mean the little offenses which crowd every day, such as flashes of temper, little unkindnesses to those around us, only partly voluntary motions of concupiscence, remarks that do no serious damage to others but which they would resent, vulgar exclamations, little vanities, neglect of grace, irritation of others, and so forth.

Sometimes these faults are so slight that they are not matter for Confession because it is doubtful whether they are even venially offensive. But they are imperfections which people who are striving for the higher life should try to avoid. And the man or woman who makes a daily examination of conscience will learn to avoid many of them.

Priests who instruct many converts are in a position to testify that non-Catholics who have undoubtedly belonged to the soul of the Church because they were living in good conscience as Protestants, and who afterwards come into the body of the Church, have often led lives of startling cleanliness, never offending against the sixth commandment, grave matters of justice, and so on, but still absolutely lacking a high spiritual outlook. While avoiding grave sins, they have not been capable of paying serious attention to the mastery of themselves in venial faults. They have often not considered it necessary to avoid these faults. Their ignorance would save them from a great share of guilt, but nevertheless it is not ordinarily possible to offend in any way and have a perfectly calm conscience about it. These people have not atoned for their faults and have forgotten them. But simply to forget a sin, without being sorry for it, or without being sorry at least in general for sins committed, means that the sin has not been forgiven. We must repent even of our venial sins. If we do not, we will be punished for them either on

this earth or in purgatory before we can enter heaven.

All these facts prove the value of daily examination of conscience, even for those who commit no serious sin. Thank God there are many who never sin mortally.

CHAPTER XVIII

RECOLLECTION; AVOIDANCE OF DISTRACTION IN PRAYER

Two of the most recommended practices for growth in spirituality are: I. Recollection; II. Avoidance of distractions in prayer. We will take up these points in the order named.

Recollection

By recollection, in the ascetic sense, we mean calling to mind God's presence in the soul. The recollected soul concentrates on God and Divine affairs and withdraws itself from external and earthly attractions. The soul is, as it were, alone with God.

Recollection is divided into active and passive. Active recollection is attainable by ordinary grace and by anybody who has this Divine assistance. Without it, salvation is not possible for a person who has reached the age of reason, as prayer is an impossibility without it. Passive recollection requires the special assistance of God. The Creator takes possession of the faculties of the soul and unites Himself

with it in an extraordinary manner that is impossible of attainment without His special grace. Passive recollection is a study of mystic, not of ascetic, theology. The ordinary soul should not strive for it, but should concentrate earnest effort on the attainment of active recollection. If God wishes to give the passive type, He will do so, but it will not come as a result of our attempt.

The following means for the attainment of active recollection are suggested by spiritual writers: I. The cultivation of silence and solitude (which is possible even in the midst of turmoil by learning introspection); II. The avoidance of distracting and dissipating things that are not of necessity; III. The frequent recalling that we are in the presence of God and that we are temples of the Holy Ghost.

The following texts show how great a reliance we can place on the fact that God is near us, not merely because He is necessarily everywhere, but also because He dwells in us in a special manner when we love and serve Him:

"If any man love Me," said Christ, "He will keep My word, and My Father will love him; and We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him." (John xiv, 23.)

"He that keepeth His commandments," says St. John (I John iii, 24), "abideth in Him, and He in him. And in this we know that He abideth in us by the Spirit which He hath given us."

“God is charity,” again says St. John (I John iv, 16); “and he that abideth in charity abideth in God, and God in him.”

“Know you not that your members are the temple of the Holy Ghost,” asks St. Paul (I Cor. vi, 19), “who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?”

If we also remember that the Scriptures repeatedly speak of Christ as our Life in a spiritual sense, and if we realize the ineffably close union between our natural life and our bodies and remember that the link between our souls and immortal Life is even greater, we will have little difficulty in imagining the personal presence of Christ wherever we are.

Avoidance of Distraction in Prayer

By distraction in prayer we mean the diversion of the mind from God and holy things to the affairs of the world.

Prayer, we must remember, is either mental or vocal. It is obvious that distraction in mental prayer makes us stop praying. But diversion and vocal prayer are simultaneously possible, for we can continue to utter the words while the mind is wandering.

If we have had the formal intention of praying, vocal prayer still continues to be prayer even though

the mind should wander. Suppose one has the duty of reciting the Canonical Office. Nobody but a miracle man or woman could go through this long exercise day after day without distractions. Hence, as a writer in the **Catholic Encyclopedia** points out, they "are esteemed to have fulfilled their obligation even though their distractions have been abundant and absorbing." The Church recommends that the Office be said without distraction; but she knows human nature too well to expect that it will always be.

Distractions that are not deliberately wished for should not bother us. While we should try to keep our mind on our prayers, it will wander in spite of us. We should not allow ourselves to be troubled when it does. Nor should we delude ourselves into believing that the prayer is inefficacious. The intention counts most in all matters spiritual.

Wilful distraction, or the wilful surrender of the mind to worldly things, constitutes a venial sin (but not a mortal one) because it is an act of irreverence towards God. But even it does not invalidate an act of worship, in most cases; for instance, a priest who is administering the sacraments and goes through the outward formula and has the proper intention does not, by distraction, invalidate the sacrament; although he sins grievously if he is so distracted as to risk the validity of the sacrament by not paying suf-

ficient attention to guard the necessary matter and form.

Frequency in prayer, and a cultivation of love for the spiritual, are the best recipes for avoiding distraction.

CHAPTER XIX

DESOLATION OF SOUL A TEST FROM GOD

While the highest happiness possible on this earth comes through the practice of religion, God gives His servants periods of bitterness when the light seems to be shut out from heaven. He puts us through the fearful test that came to His Son in the temptation in the desert, when the very Second Person of the Trinity was compelled, in His human nature, to wrestle with the "prince of this world"; and He gives us a taste of Gethsemane, when in anguish, we are forced by nature to cry out that, if possible, the chalice of suffering might pass; or He makes us feel the abandonment of Calvary, when, deserted by all mankind but the helpless little group of saints at the foot of the Cross, Jesus cried out in anguish: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Very Son of God, He was made by His Father to drink the cup of suffering to the bitter dregs, and to look down upon His spotless Mother, also suffering.

He said that the servant would be like the Master, and the Church has always taught that we are saved

by conformity with Him. Hence we cannot expect to escape our share of suffering. It will come, indeed, whether we want it or not.

Why this should be, is the hardest question in all religious truth to answer. Sin explains the riddle. We cannot, in this life, fully appreciate the terrible-ness of seriously offending God. We delude ourselves into thinking that the offense is not as bad as revelation warns. But when we look at what Christ voluntarily went through for us; when we consider what Mary, His immaculate Mother, suffered; and when we consider the suffering by our fellow creatures on every side of us, we are appalled, and are made to realize how awful is the offense to demand such reparation to God's offended dignity. The pain is so great that without an eternity to bring us happiness this life would be a ghastly joke.

Worldlings try to make out that God is unjust in this. But they forget that He is absolute perfection and that, as He necessarily exists, He cannot be anything but perfect nor hence be satisfied with what is rebellious. They also forget the dignity of human nature and the wonderful glory that has been given to man in his intellect and free will, and the awful collapse of that dignity in serious revolt against a perfect God. If an emperor leaves his court to wallow in the filth with pigs, how great is the contempt of the world! But every man is destined for far greater glory than the wildest imagination can conjure, and

the fall of a soul into even deliberate venial sin is more serious than the desecration of any earthly throne. The dignity of God and the dignity of man himself demand that outraged justice be repaired.

Who of us can claim never to have offended God? Even great saints needed special purification to make them worthy of His courts, and why should we, the dust of the earth, dare to expect Him to give us our heaven here as well as hereafter? He has given us all the opportunity to be saints. But who of us can claim to have made good use of His grace at all times? Because we have not, we must accept the consequence of sin—suffering.

Not only will He send us difficulties, but at times He will withdraw all spiritual or sensible consolation that comes from religion itself. Because He took the burden of our sins upon Him, Christ, despite His constant beatific vision resulting from the Hypostatic Union, cried out on the cross that He had been forsaken. And great saints, like Francis of Assisi and Teresa of Lisieux, the Little Flower of Jesus, have also been forced to undergo nightmares of the soul. If these pure souls have had this awful experience, how can we hope to escape?

St. Teresa of Lisieux at one time in her life could not see how any man could sin against faith. So God gave her a test that lasted for months. She wrote, as a result of this experience: "No doubt, dear Mother, you will think I exaggerate somewhat

the 'night of my soul.' If you judge by the poems I have composed this year, it must seem as though I have been flooded with consolations, like a child for whom the veil of Faith is almost rent asunder. And yet it is not a veil—it is a wall which rises to the very heavens and shuts out the starry sky. When I sing of the happiness of heaven and the eternal possession of God, I do not feel any joy therein; for I sing only of what I wish to believe. Sometimes, I confess, a little ray of sunshine illumines my dark night, and I enjoy peace for an instant, but later, the remembrance of this ray of light, instead of consoling me, makes the blackness thicker still." (Autobiography. Eighth English Edition. P. 142.)

Little Teresa, however, was not the only saint who had such an experience. Practically all the great servants of God had their night of the soul. St. Francis de Sales tells us that St. Francis of Assisi's lasted for two years.

How should we act in these emergencies? Many, it is to be feared, turn away from God and serve Him with fervor no more. But we should take the advice of St. Francis de Sales and Angela of Foligno. "The prayer most acceptable to God is that which is made forcibly and with constraint; that is, which we undertake not from our own taste or inclination, but solely in order to please God, to which we are as it were driven by our will, conquering and doing violence to the repugnance and dryness we feel. It

is the same with all other good works; for the more reluctance we feel toward their performance (whether it be external or internal), so much the more precious and estimable are they in the sight of God. The less self-interest we have in the pursuit of virtue, the greater therein will be the purity and brightness of Divine love. The child embraces his mother when she gives him sugar, but it is a greater sign of love if he embraces her when she gives him wormwood or camomile." (*Philothea*, chapter 14.)

If we find ourselves in this unhappy condition, St. Francis de Sales suggests that we examine our conscience and learn, but without undue anxiety or painstaking, whether the root of the evil be in ourselves. If we cannot discover the cause, let us give up prying research and seek cures. Let us humble ourselves profoundly before God. Let us call upon Him and ask: "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation" (Ps. li, 12) and say: "My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me." (Matt. xxvi, 39.) Let us go to our confessor and open our souls entirely to him. Let us not be too eager for deliverance, for while it is all right to wish to be free, we must not passionately desire it: "Not my will, but Thine, be done." Finally, let us keep up our courage and not diminish, but increase, our good works.

Difficulties will come. But they are to be expected in a sin-ridden world, while the hope of an absolutely

happy eternity makes recompense. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man," St. Paul taught, "what things God hath prepared for them that love Him."

CHAPTER XX

SCRUPULOUSNESS A DISEASE OF THE SOUL; PRACTICAL PLANS FOR ITS CURE

Scrupulousness, or the fear of committing sin when what one is doing is really good or only indifferent, is a bothersome spiritual disease. There is a type of scrupulosity which is merely the exercise of prudent caution for fear of doing wrong; but the diseased type is the exercise of this caution through frivolous motives. Morbid scrupulosity looks upon God as something of a bull-dog, ready to snap at the soul on the slightest pretext. It forgets both His mercy and His justice.

Scruple comes from the Latin word *scrupulus*, which meant a small stone in the shoe that caused pain when the wearer walked.

The Exposition of Christian Doctrine, prepared for the Christian Brothers, gives the following causes of scruples:

I. Internal.—1. Ignorance and that narrowness of mind which can but half grasp an idea, and which cannot distinguish between consent and mere temptation, between venial and mortal sin; 2. A lively

imagination ready in conjuring up difficulties; 3. A melancholy disposition prone to fear and suspicion; 4. An undue excitement of the nervous system, brought on by sickness, excessive work, prolonged vigils, or immoderate fasting; 5. Secret pride, obstinacy, or the desire for a chimerical perfection.

II. External.—1. Association with scrupulous persons; 2. The imprudent reading of works tainted with rigorism, or treating of predestination, final perseverance, and efficacious grace; 3. The devil, who brings trouble to the senses, the imagination, and the judgment, in order to rob God's yoke of its sweetness, and to drive the soul to despair; 4. The will of God, who, by means of scruples, puts the humanity of mortified souls to the test; who thus holds on the brink of evil those whose consciences are too lax; and thus also makes those who have led disorderly lives atone for their past deeds; for scruples are a downright torment.

The opposite of a scrupulous conscience is a lax one, which, on insufficient grounds, deems something unlawful to be lawful or something seriously sinful to be venial.

The Exposition of Christian Doctrine says: "Neither a lax conscience nor a scrupulous conscience is to be followed, because these consciences, acting on trivial grounds, are improbable and imprudent. Scrupulosity may best be cured by blind obedience to a prudent director; laxity is remedied especially by

prayer, meditation, and the sacraments." (Quotations from Part II, C. 2.)

When scrupulous persons go to Confession, they should refrain from telling things as sins unless they are absolutely certain that these acts are sinful. Although they may occasionally prove mistaken, they show virtue by this omission because they are practicing obedience.

These people are especially troubled about whether or not they give consent to temptations against chastity, charity, and faith. Unless they can swear that they have given consent, let them refrain from confessing the supposed sins.

Another thing constantly troubling them is whether or not they have correctly confessed sins in their past lives. They are also bothered about whether their Confessions have been good. Unless they can swear that they have committed mortal sins which have not been confessed, they should not bother about anything in the past. If they cannot swear that they have deliberately made a bad Confession, the chances are that all the sins they have told have been properly confessed. In case of doubt, a Confession is always held to have been valid. Hence a safe rule for a scrupulous person is never to bother about past Confessions, unless there is not the slightest doubt about having forgotten to tell a mortal sin. They are advised, when examining their consciences, never to go back of their last Confession, unless they can

take an oath that they have been making sacrilegious Confessions.

These people are often inclined to argue with the priest. They think that perhaps he does not know his theology. They are afraid to follow his advice. In this state, their pride has sometimes become damnable. Far from being virtuous, they are then precisely the opposite. But they can often be won over if the priest offers to take the responsibility before God if they follow his advice.

Scrupulosity can sometimes be cured by learning that we are generally permitted to follow a probable opinion if there is doubt about whether or not we are permitted to do something. Even though there should be stronger reasons on the other side, if there is a solidly probable opinion that a course of action is permitted, we can take that course, except in cases where very grave issues are at stake, as when matters of faith are involved, or the truths necessary to salvation are endangered, or the valid administration of a sacrament is in danger, or we act against the interests of a neighbor that we are bound to protect.

The following principles help to apply this advice: "A doubtful law is not binding"; hence if I am not sure that this is a day of abstinence, I can eat meat. "In case of doubt, we must declare in favor of that which is in possession"; hence if I doubt whether or not I have taken a drink after midnight,

I can still go to Communion, because my liberty is in possession. "A fact is not to be presumed but must be proved"; hence if there is a doubt about whether a man has fallen under mortal sin, he is able to go to Communion. "The presumption is in favor of the validity of an action till the contrary has been proved"; hence in case of doubt, a Confession should be presumed to have been valid. "In case of doubt, the presumption is in favor of a superior"; hence if there is question about the lawfulness of what a father confessor advises, the penitent is perfectly safe in following it.

CHAPTER XXI

IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE GOD WITHOUT FAITH; HOW THIS VIRTUE CAN BE CULTIVATED

Because the Divine virtues of faith, hope, and charity play such a large part in our spiritual life, a treatment of them is essential to ascetics. We will take most of our data from St. Thomas Aquinas, as this entire work is being built on the doctrine of the saints. First, we will consider faith.

The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that without faith it is impossible to please God. Christ, when commissioning His Apostles to evangelize all nations, declared to them that he who does not believe will be condemned. Many other texts showing the need of faith could be brought forth. The necessity of believing is one of the paramount doctrines of revelation.

DeHarbe's **Catechism** gives this definition of faith: "Faith is a virtue infused by God into our souls, by which we believe, without doubting, all those things which God has revealed, and proposes by His Church to our belief."

By faith we hold firmly and without doubting

what God has revealed, because He has revealed it, although we cannot completely see nor understand it; "for," as Father DeHarbe says, "faith is founded, not on our seeing or complete understanding, but on the word of God. 'Faith is the evidence of things that appear not.' " (Heb. xi, 1.)

We learn from this that faith is not something overwhelming. It is not as easy as it is to agree that two and two make four. It is an acceptance, not by the force of intuitionism, but on the authority of God. While we can prove without question that it is not opposed to reason, and while we can demonstrate by reason alone that there is a God, that we have immortal souls, that God has made a revelation, that He has founded the Catholic Church as His one true Church, and that her speaking to us is His voice commanding us, we nevertheless do not pretend that faith removes every unreasonable doubt. If I deny that two and two make four, I am so certainly wrong that everybody scoffs; but faith does not offer that type of absolute certainty. It is clouded, even though reasonable, because man is here on probation, and faith gives him as opportunity for humility and service in both the intellect and will. In the next world, the clouds will disappear and absolute knowledge will supplant faith.

Furthermore, the faith demanded for our salvation is beyond the natural powers of man. We must have Divine assistance. "For by grace you are saved

through faith," St. Paul told the Ephesians, ii, 8, "and that not of yourselves: for it is the gift of God."

Unbelievers cannot make this act because they are ignorant or do not trust in the will of God or, having known His revelation, they refuse to give assent to it. Some impious men give assent to the word of God because they are compelled by their reason to do so, but they do not make an act of faith, inasmuch as the truth is hateful to them. They are like the devils who, St. James tells us, believe and tremble. Heretics, while refusing to accept part of revelation, claim to believe other parts, but their belief is not an act of faith, for they do not give this assent on the authority of God revealing, but on their own private judgment. Sinners who have the virtue of faith, however, can make an act of faith, even though they are in the state of mortal sin, so long as this sin is not one directed against faith itself. Faith elicited in mortal sin is uninformed: that is, it exists in a soul that lacks Divine charity.

We can see from this that supernatural faith exists only in the Catholic Church. But we must remember that all people who are living in good conscience, regardless of what their public religious affiliation is, are members of the soul of the Church. Hence genuine faith is by no means confined to the 300,000,000 people whom the world calls Catholics.

A sin against faith consists in not wishing to sub-

mit the mind to God's word through homage or through love for this word. People striving for high spiritual advancement, therefore, should cultivate the opposite virtue and be particularly humble and ready in their submission. Catholic reading and attendance at instructive sermons are essential in our day to glowing faith.

If a man lacks faith, it is his own fault. God wishes every man to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth, as the Bible plainly teaches. Hence when a person has reached the age of reason he obtains grace enough to believe in the manner sufficient for salvation. If he does not believe, it is because he resists the actual grace of God offering him this gift. God, however, dispenses this grace in different measures to different men, for the world is His flower garden and He likes the little as well as the regal flowers.

Men must never forget that this gift can be easily lost. If we are careless in our reading or associations, God may not give us the strength to overcome the onslaughts on our faith. A youth who keeps lewd company cannot long remain chaste, and a mind that delights in the filth of blasphemy and scoffing cannot long remain in faith. Sins of the flesh are particularly dangerous to faith.

To pretend that, for culture, it is necessary to read those authors who are always undermining faith is to show an ignorance of literature. No man can pos-

sibly read all the good classics today, and one who insists upon reading those that are dangerous is taking risks that can be excused no more than the sophistry that argues the necessity of gross immorality in order to attain experience.

The Church stands in the foremost rank as a promoter of education and culture. But the ancient adage, "Birds of a feather flock together," has a strict application in the spiritual world as well as in ordinary life, and the warning of our religion that dangerous reading is a constant menace to morality and faith is founded on both Divine wisdom and the experience of centuries.

A certain number of authors scoff today at the Church because she surrounds her children with so many safeguards, as a protection to faith and morals. These men complain that Catholicity, by this practice, is raising a barrier between herself and the world. We freely admit the charge. The Church frequently raises such a wall, because Christ did the same thing. He told His Apostles that He had taken them out of the world and that the world hated them as a result. If they were of the world, it would love them. Obeying His spirit, we would deem it a calamity to have the Church invaded by the spirit of the world. If the world wants our company, it must come to us. We will not go to it.

CHAPTER XXII

THE VIRTUE OF HOPE

Hope is a supernatural virtue by which our will, relying on the help of God, is drawn towards Him revealed by faith, as towards One who will give us everlasting life and be our perfect happiness.

Faith is the necessary basis of hope, although every other true good can be its object, provided that this good is subordinated to the principal object, God Himself. Hence to take delight in the prospect of seeing the Blessed Virgin or our loved ones in heaven is to have the virtue of hope.

Hope is divided into habitual, actual, living, and dead. Habitual hope is the Divinely-infused power of making acts of hope with the help of grace. Actual hope is the act of the will which, with the aid of grace, trusts in coming eternal happiness. Living hope is that entertained by a soul in the state of grace; it is hope joined with charity. Dead hope is that which is in a soul in the state of mortal sin.

As with faith, we cannot hope in the manner necessary for salvation unless we have the assistance of God's grace.

The two great sins against hope are despair and presumption. Despair consists in thinking that it is impossible to practice a life of virtue and thus gain God; or in refusing to use the means God has given us for our forgiveness. This sin makes all supernatural effort impossible, and the sinner in some sort damns himself. Hence, in a sense, it is the greatest of sins.

Presumption is the hope of being saved by our own resources, not in God's way nor by the help of His grace. Men who are bold in their crimes because of the facility with which God pardons sinners; those who put off conversion or repentance until the end of their lives; those who imagine that faith alone without good works will save them; and those who, having succeeded in worldly affairs, proudly imagine that their own ability is sufficient to bring them everlasting happiness without the aid of the Church or sacraments, are all guilty of presumption.

Persons seeking high virtue should avoid despair and presumption by means of humility, by frequent meditation on God's justice and mercy, and by a tender devotion to St. Mary Magdalen, St. Augustine, the Good Thief, and others who were made saints by the infinite mercy of Christ. The love and fear of God promote hope.

Attached to the virtue of hope is filial fear, by which we have a holy respect for God's excellence and shrink from what displeases Him. A lower form

of fear is servile fear, which is a dread of the penalties and punishments He can inflict. It too is a holy fear, when we look upon these punishments as sent by Him, but it is not so valuable as filial fear.

Filial fear is closely related to the gift of the Holy Ghost known as fear, which consists in subjecting oneself to God and the action of the Holy Spirit, not resisting Him, but rather revering Him in all, lest one lose Him.

Hope differs from fear in that the direct aim of the former is trust of being united to God, while the aim of the latter is dread of losing Him.

In the beginning, servile fear often co-exists with filial fear. But as charity grows in us, hope so increases that filial fear finally has only the name of fear, "taking on the most pure character of filial or chaste fear, which is wholly penetrated with the love of God, Who is the one and only truth, and Whose loss would be for us the greatest evil and in some sort the only evil." (**Catechism of the Summa.**) This fear, in its highest perfection, will exist in heaven, for while there will be no danger of losing God, the soul will tremble with wonder when it sees how infinitely He is above His creatures and there will be the most intimate consciousness in the soul that its happiness comes from Him alone.

Hope itself will no longer exist in heaven, for it will be swallowed up in the possession of God, without the slightest danger of ever losing Him.

Today, the virtue is greatly necessary. Pessimism is enveloping the minds of many outside the Church. Man, seen in his selfishness and without any seeming possibility of rising above this, is detestable. We can never love sin in itself and if we behold the sinner and think that there is no method of making him clean, we cannot help but hate him. Only a hope of forgiveness, not merely for ourselves but for others, makes true love of fellow man possible. Without hope, life is the grimmest of tragedies and man is the sorry plaything of blind fate. The way is paved for the most heinous injustice, because if there is no hope there is no use practicing anything but meanness and basest selfishness, nor is mankind as a whole deserving of any better treatment. Hope that a forgiving God will cleanse His erring children and make them decent towards one another is necessary to civilization itself, to say nothing of mutual happiness in eternity.

CHAPTER XXIII

CATHOLIC IDEALS OF LOVE OF GOD AND MAN DIFFER FROM THE IDEALS OF THE WORLD

Charity is the love of God and man. To have it in the sense that makes it a summary of all true religion, we must have the special help of God through grace.

The commandment of charity is given in Christ's words: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind, and with thy whole strength. This is the greatest and the first commandment. And the second is like to this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." (Mark xii, 30, 31; Matt. xxii, 37-40.)

Love of God implies the desire to do His will and to be united to Him. The man who says that he loves God and does not bother going to church, but deems that this love is enough, does not know the first essential about love of God.

Love of God, if it is directed towards Him because He is so infinitely good and lovable in Himself, not only takes away all mortal sin, but, if it is intense enough, also removes all venial sin and the temporal

punishment due for sin. It implies doing all that God has required for our justification. Hence nobody could be saved by love who would determine not to use the sacraments.

That degree of love in which we are determined to lose everything rather than commit a grievous sin is absolutely necessary for salvation. A higher degree is that in which we determine not only to avoid all mortal sin but all deliberate venial sin. The highest degree is that in which we are determined to do always what is most perfect or most agreeable to God.

St. Thomas Aquinas says that charity is a virtue which raises us to a life of intimacy with God for His own sake, insofar as He is His own happiness and deigns to communicate His happiness to us. Charity, he says, is the queen of all virtues. It brings to us a participation in the Divine nature that elevates us above every natural order, making us gods and members of the Divine family; and it implies in us principles of activity proportionate to this Divine existence that enable us to act as true children of God, even as God Himself acts—knowing Him as He knows Himself, loving Him as He loves Himself, enjoying Him as He enjoys Himself. Not until we have attained heaven will we have this full fruition of charity, but even on earth it raises us above other men and gives us powers that we would not otherwise have. Charity rules all the other virtues.

As St. Paul points out, without charity all other good acts are worthless.

But how are we to know that we love God? St. John says (I John v, 3): "This is the charity of God, that we keep His commandments." And Christ says: "He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me." (John xiv, 21.)

Two kinds of love are discernible in charity and they are inseparable. One is the love of complacency in God insofar as He is Himself happy, and the other is a love of complacency in God insofar as He is our own happiness. As St. Thomas points out, if God were not our own good we would have no reason at all for loving Him, and if there were not in Him, as in its fount, the good that He is for us, we would not love Him by the love with which we love Him.

Charity implies love of God above all others, because He is the source of all happiness and goodness. But we must also love ourselves, because we must wish for ourselves the happiness of God above all things except God. If we do not wish this, we oppose the will of God, who has given us as our chief duty on earth the saving of our own souls.

We are commanded to love our neighbors "as ourselves." By the word neighbor, is meant every human being who can attain heaven or has already reached there. The words "as ourselves" mean that we ought to practice a charity towards our neighbor

similar to that towards ourselves, but it does not mean that this love ought to be equal to or greater than our self-charity. We would not be permitted to damn ourselves or greatly risk damnation to save another.

The motive for love of neighbor is wholly supernatural. We could not love him if we regarded him apart from his destiny, for men are grasping and selfish and are always trying to take advantage of one another in the struggle of life. Our purpose in loving him is because he has been created to the image of God, redeemed by the blood of Christ, and destined to eternal happiness. It is as a child of the Heavenly Father that we love him.

Our self-love is not an inordinate nor selfish love. It is not based on worldly aggrandizement, fleshy pleasure, or covetousness. If it were, the virtue of charity would be altogether lacking in it. It is a love based on God as the fount of perfection and happiness. And just so far as we allow creatures to stand between us and God, the love is dimmed.

The world has a bilgy idea of love. It mistakes a maudlin optimism and philanthropic taxation for charity, and it tries to promote love without the use of the channels of grace which alone can give it. Men naturally hate each other, like animals. While they have a few friends, as a rule, for whom they are willing to make sacrifices, this feeling of love is prompted more by selfish motives than anything else.

Only when grace steps in and lifts the soul above its natural state is genuine charity possible.

The person seeking perfection should not confine works of charity to those cases where even the pagans might assist, but should search out difficult and trying opportunities to practice the virtue. If we cultivate intense love of God and love of ourselves and our neighbors because of God, good works will follow as fruit grows on a healthy tree and what is naturally repulsive will become easy.

CHAPTER XXIV

PRUDENCE, JUSTICE, TEMPERANCE, AND FORTITUDE MOST PROFITABLE VIRTUES

Wisdom, declares the inspired **Book of Wisdom**, "teacheth temperance, and prudence, and justice, and fortitude, which are things as men can have nothing more profitable in life" (viii, 7). These virtues are called the cardinal virtues by Catholic ethical writers. The word cardinal comes from a Latin word meaning hinge. The other virtues hinge on these four.

Four wounds, shows St. Thomas Aquinas, were inflicted on the soul by the sin of our first parents—ignorance in the reason, malice in the will, infirmity in the irascible appetite, and concupiscence in the concupiscible appetite. The cardinal virtues are opposed to these four wounds.

As the saint shows, "it belongs to prudence to decide in what way, and by what means, man may in his conduct attain the golden mean of reason." Hence, as Father Kenelm Vaughn shows in the **Armory of Holy Scripture**, prudence is the measure and rule of the other moral virtues. The functions of prudence are to seek the means and circumstances

necessary for performing an act virtuously; to decide upon the fitness of the means and circumstances that present themselves; and to command the moral virtues to employ the suitable means and observe the suitable circumstances discovered.

Justice, which needs to be insisted upon with mighty force today, is a moral virtue which inclines the will constantly and perpetually to render each one his due. Justice regulates man in his relation to fellow men; the other moral virtues regulate him in himself. While justice redounds to the good of the performer himself, it is primarily ordered to others. The virtue resides in the will, one of the noblest faculties of man. Some of man's perfections are shared with the lower animals. But justice cannot be. It is true in a most literal sense that the more just you are the more of a man you are. Sometimes we are able to pay our debts to others in the strict rigor of equivalence. This is genuine justice. But when the debt cannot be fully paid, while yet we recognize our indebtedness in some manner, the virtues we feel, which all fall under justice, are gratitude, vindication, truth, affability, liberality, and equity. Some debts it is impossible for us to pay, like those we owe God and our parents. But then the following virtues, all falling under justice, may be exercised: Religion, filial piety, reverence, and obedience. "As you would that men should do to you, do you also to them in like manner," says Luke vi, 31. "The blessing of

the Lord is upon the head of the just," says Proverbs x, 6.

Temperance places pleasure under the control of reason. It is primarily concerned with the operations by which the individual man is preserved or the human species is propagated. Abstinence, sobriety, chastity, and modesty are species of temperance. If you need to cultivate temperance procure Thomas á Kempis' **Imitation of Christ** and read a little of it daily. And remember that it is not necessary to be a drunkard in order to offend against temperance. You can do so by eating too much, by overdressing, by being overbearing, and in many other ways.

Fortitude is the virtue that removes the difficulties which repel the will from doing what reason requires. We may be called upon either to endure or to attack these evils. Fortitude not only provides the courage needed to endure, but also tempers courage necessary for the attack, lest it degenerate into rashness. Fortitude is ready to attack the greatest evils rather than deflect from right reason, and is primarily concerned with the risks of death, secondarily with other evils. Magnanimity, or the readiness to surrender honor rather than right reason; magnificence, or the readiness to surrender wealth in the same circumstances; patience, which triumphs over sadness produced by misfortune, even when incurred in the pursuit of virtue; and perseverance, or the courage to keep up the good fight, all fall under fortitude.

He who has had patience enough to read through this brief description of the cardinal virtues will agree with the **Book of Wisdom** in admitting that they are the most profitable things in life.

CHAPTER XXV

ACT OF PERFECT LOVE FOR GOD WIPES SOUL CLEAN OF MORTAL SIN

An act of perfect charity, because of the promise of God, restores a sinner to God's grace and friendship, wins pardon for mortal sins regardless of their number or grievousness, and obtains the remission of the eternal punishment due for sin and always a part of the temporal punishment, with sometimes the whole of the temporal punishment. It procures a pardon of all venial sins we have repented of and within the limits God has determined. It also brings remission of penalty for these sins according to the fervor of our act of charity.

By perfect charity, we mean love of God because of His infinite perfections. If we love God in order to avoid punishment or because we shall be eternally rewarded, our love will be acceptable to Him but it will be only imperfect charity. Perfect charity is required for the great results we have outlined above, when they come to us apart from the sacraments. There are different degrees of perfect charity. The first is pure love of God for the sake of His infinite

perfections, and makes us shun mortal sin at any cost. The second degree is pure love of God for the sake of His infinite perfections, and makes us firmly resolve to avoid at any price not only mortal sin but also venial sin. The third degree, and the highest, is pure love of God for the sake of His infinite perfections; it disposes us to sacrifice everything in this world rather than to omit what is most pleasing to Him and enables us to follow most closely His Son, Jesus Christ. It is impossible for us always to have this pure degree of perfect charity, but it can not be denied that it is possible for isolated acts of it to come to any soul that really yearns for salvation.

An act of perfect charity that is highly commended is this: "My God, I am all thine; I mean to live only for Thee."

While we should strive to get the second and third degrees of perfect charity, the first is sufficient to make ourselves absolutely sure of going to heaven if we die immediately after the act. As Father Rouvier says in **The Conquest of Heaven**, a little book which received the special commendation of Pope Pius X, an act of perfect love does not necessarily mean that we have no longer attachment to venial sin. Such a disposition is undoubtedly very desirable, but not essential, since without it the first degree of perfect charity may exist with all of its effects. To maintain that such a disposition is indispensable

would be erroneous and contrary to the teaching of theologians as important as they are numerous. And if you object that there is something inconceivable in this, seeing the marvelous effects in the soul of an act of perfect love, there is but one thing to do and that is to emphasize the infinite goodness of God, whose adopted children we have the inestimable privilege to be. (Page 19.)

When God has forgiven a sin it is forgiven forever, and if we have piled up a wealth of merit and then have lost it by falling into mortal sin, the whole treasury returns when we make an act of perfect love. If a soul does not happen to be in mortal sin and makes an act of perfect love, this act will blot out whatever venial sin has been on the soul and for which it is truly sorry. If the soul is altogether without sin, it will be flooded with new wealths of grace by an act of perfect love.

Father Rouvier gives us the advice that in making these acts, a person may remain as cold as ice and hard as stone and still make an act of perfect love or perfect contrition, because it is unnecessary to have any feeling of sensible sorrow. It suffices that in spite of its corrupt uncleanness of heart the soul prefers God to the whole world and to itself. We must remember that sensible feeling is not the love that is required; a motion of our will constitutes perfect love or perfect contrition. By perfect contrition we mean a sorrow for having offended God and the firm

purpose of sinning no more, because He is so immensely good and perfect in Himself. It also is divided into three degrees the same as perfect love and it has exactly the same effects in the soul.

Neither perfect love nor perfect contrition is difficult. If we are wholly resigned to God's will and unreservedly accept our life as God plans it for us; if we murmur neither at the thorns with which He paves our path nor at sorrows permitted by Him, we may be reassured as to the reality of our love, for as Father Rouvier points out, love is at the bottom of our heart and we may love God really and truly without perhaps being aware of our loving Him. Father Rouvier shows that it is in the will that we have perfect love, because the motion of our will alone and not the motion of our sensible feeling depends on us. St. Augustine says: "You want to love. By this true desire you have love."

The benefit to us of this doctrine is great indeed. If we are in the state of mortal sin, it is impossible for us to gain an indulgence or to benefit by the prayers of the Church. If we should die in that state we would be eternally damned, but, while we are still on earth, by a single act of perfect love or contrition we can be immediately restored to the friendship of God without any further ceremony. A Catholic must always remember, however, that perfect contrition and perfect love implicitly demand that he confess his sins and live up to the Church. This thought need

not be necessarily expressed in the mind at the time we make an act of perfect love or perfect contrition, but nobody could really love God who had no intention of doing what He has demanded we do for our salvation.

It is wrong to think that an act of perfect love or perfect contrition is practically impossible for the average person. The fact is that every one of us can, with the aid of God's grace, make such acts many times a day.

CHAPTER XXVI

PROMISES MADE BY THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS TO ST. MARGARET MARY ALACOQUE

The tender devotions of the Catholic Church are a source of perpetual mystery to the non-Catholic, but have an impelling charm which constantly wins converts when they are better understood. Most non-Catholics can not understand why we should want to pray to the Sacred Heart instead of praying to God under one of His other titles, but when they realize that, in praying to the Sacred Heart, we petition exactly the same Jesus Christ they themselves love, but merely keep in mind, in a special way, His marvelous love for us, they cannot help but be impressed.

When we adore the Sacred Heart, we do not adore just the flesh that Christ's human heart contains, but we adore Him entire. Because of the Hypostatic Union, or the union of the Divine nature in the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity with a human nature, Christ's human nature is given the highest type of adoration. But the union is always remembered. And when we adore the Sacred Heart, we adore It as connected with the Infinite Godhead.

Adoration is always directed to the Person. The adoration is similar to that given Him in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar.

The Heart is particularly singled out because of the popular belief in the heart as the seat of human love. But even if science would prove conclusively that the heart is not this seat, it could show no mistake on the part of the Church, for the adoration, as we have shown above, is given to Christ entire.

The idea of devotion to the Sacred Heart has been implicitly in the Church from the beginning. St. Margaret Mary, a Visitation nun of the seventeenth century, canonized in May, 1920, popularized the devotion and emphasized it, as the result of visions granted to her. The promises made by Jesus to her for souls devout to His Sacred Heart follow :

"I. I will give them all the graces necessary in their state of life.

"II. I will establish peace in their homes.

"III. I will comfort them in all their afflictions.

"IV. I will be their secure refuge during life, and above all in death.

"V. I will bestow a large blessing upon all their undertakings.

"VI. Sinners shall find in My Heart the source and the infinite ocean of mercy.

"VII. Tepid souls shall grow fervent.

"VIII. Fervent souls shall quickly mount to high perfection.

"IX. I will bless every place where a picture of My Heart shall be set up and honored.

"X. I will give to priests the gift of touching the most hardened hearts.

"XI. Those who shall promote this devotion shall have their names written in My Heart, never to be blotted out.

"XII. I promise thee, in the excessive mercy of My Heart, that My all-powerful love will grant to all those who communicate on the first Friday in nine consecutive months, the grace of final penitence; they shall not die in My disgrace nor without receiving the sacraments; My Divine Heart shall be their safe refuge in this last moment."

In all these promises, it is understood that the soul has the duty of living up to public revelation and co-operating with grace.

CHAPTER XXVII

WHY THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY IS PROCLAIMED BLESSED BY ALL GENERATIONS

Go back with me, for a few minutes, to ancient Israel, the one land on earth where the true God was adored and where His glorious Temple, with its golden decorations, shone in the brilliant semi-tropical sun. For centuries His people have been awaiting the fulfillment of the many prophecies that there will arise a Savior, who will deliver God's elect. Every girl of Israel has hoped to be the mother of this Redeemer. The life of the nation is centered on the expectation of Emanuel to come.

One day, a shy little maiden, who has in her humility never dared to expect that she will really be the mother of the great Prince, is astounded as she kneels in prayer to see an angel in her room. She is afraid, but he bids her not to fear. "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: Blessed art thou among women," says the visitor.

Then the vision announces its purpose: "Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shall bring forth a Son: and thou shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the

Most High; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of David His father; and He shall reign in the house of Jacob forever. And of His kingdom there shall be no end."

Mary asks how this can be. She says that she knows not man. Her declaration of virginity, placed in the present tense, means, according to the ancient traditions of Christianity, that she is under a vow of chastity. She is to be a perpetual virgin.

The angel answers: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

Heaven comes to Mary, offering her the Divine Motherhood. The Expectation of Israel is to be born. God waits on the word of a woman. And Mary says: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to Thy word." In that instant, the Son of God is conceived as a human being, through the power of God, in her virginal womb. The tremendous mystery of the Incarnation has occurred. Justice and peace have met and kissed. The heavens have burst open and have come down. The prayers of the holy patriarchs, "Come, O Lord, and do not delay," have had their fulfillment. God offered all this to Mary, and she accepted. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; but it done to me according to Thy word."

In their conversation, the angel has told her that

her cousin, Elizabeth, an old woman, has also conceived a son. And Mary, her heart throbbing with love, hastens to the home of her cousin. How like her actions in later times, when she has hastened to the assistance of millions of her children!

The sweet story of motherhood gradually unfolds. Guarded by her faithful spouse St. Joseph, also a virgin, Mary brings forth her precious Babe, while angel choirs, and lowly shepherds, and great kings from distant climes come to pay court. We have only a few glimpses of those days, but they have burned their message deep into the hearts of men and have become the hope and solace of our race.

Revelation tells us little of the boyhood of Christ. It leaves Him alone with His mother. Only when He is lost from her, and she, with aching heart, seeks Him and finds Him, after three days, in the Temple, are we told about them. The union of the two is so precious that God tells us hardly anything about it. The delight of that knowledge is saved for heaven.

For thirty years, Christ is Mary's. For three years, He teaches men. He gave her ten times as much as He gave to us. Let men who are tempted to sneer at us for paying her honor hesitate in the face of these figures.

But the time of His public career arrives. And the very first miracle He performs is at her suggestion. When she goes to Him at the wedding feast of Cana and tells Him that the wine is all gone, He

reminds her that His time of wonder-working has not yet come. But she knows the power of her prayer, and she tells the servants to do what He commands them. When the water pots are filled, He turns the water into wine. The Scriptures are plain in the fact that He has deviated from the order that He would have followed had Mary not asked otherwise. Today, also, God hears her prayer and changes the course of events in accordance.

We have few pictures of Mary during Christ's public life. She is with the holy women who follow Him and look after His wants and those of the Apostles. But when the climax comes, and He is led forth to be crucified, she goes with Him to Calvary. She stands at the foot of the cross, and only a mother who has stood and seen her one child die can begin to appreciate what she underwent.

One of the last thoughts of the dying Jesus was of her. St. John, who was himself the "beloved disciple," tells us: "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalen. When Jesus therefore had seen His mother and the disciple standing whom He loved, He saith to His Mother: Woman, behold thy son. After that He saith to the disciple: Behold thy mother. And from that hour, the disciple took her to his own."

Because of our doctrine that Mary is the mother of all the faithful, we place ourselves in John's rôle,

Christ offers His mother to us, and we take her "to our own." We remember the doctrine of the Epistles, especially of St. Paul, that Christ is the head of a mystical body of which we, children of the Christian Church, are the members. The whole Christ, as we can amply prove from the writings of St. Augustine and the other Fathers of the early Church, implies the Redeemer and those whom He redeemed. Hence if Mary is the mother of Christ, she is our mother as well.

As Christ is a true man, she is the mother of this man. As He is also true God, she is the mother of God, because, while He existed from eternity as a Divine Person and she was born a creature in time, she, like any other mother, brought forth a person, and in this case the Person is God. "The Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God," the angel told her. And as Christ is the head of all of us, and she is the mother of Christ, she is our mother.

Because of her humility, she was not conspicuous in the early Church. But when she died, devotion to her spread and became one of the most distinguishing marks of Christianity. The faithful believe that she has been crowned the Queen of Heaven and that she has a borrowed omnipotence, because God answers every prayer she utters. She is not worshiped with Divine honor, for men know that all her glory is reflected from the Godhead, and that there is the

vast unbridgeable gulf between her and God that there is between creature and Creator. But God can allow His greatness to be reflected, and let us praise Him that He has. He has given her the highest glory that a created person can be given. And she uses her mighty power to help, by her prayers, with the salvation of men.

With her, therefore, let us cry out in exultation, as she did when she visited Elizabeth: "My soul doth magnify the Lord: and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior. Because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid; for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed."

We delight to fulfill this prophecy and to call her the Blessed Virgin Mary. And as children run to their earthly mother with all their little hurts and sorrows, we go to her, knowing that her Son cannot remain angry when His mother and ours becomes our advocate.

CHAPTER XXVIII

CONDITIONS FOR DAILY COMMUNION AS OUTLINED BY PIUS X

Great development in spirituality is practically impossible without frequent Communion. While we must admit that there have been great saints, like Mary of Egypt and other notable anchorites of the early Church, who lived for years without the sacraments, nevertheless their cases and the times in which they lived were unusual. God is not compelled to use the sacraments as the ordinary channels of His grace; but, unless conditions are extraordinary, He usually does. The Catholic who knows that Communion is the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, and does not receive It except rarely, cannot hope for a deep spiritual life, at least in our age.

Pope Pius X, on December 20, 1905, approved a decree which indicates how greatly the Church encourages frequent and even daily Communion.

He says that frequent and daily Communion should be open to all the faithful of whatever rank and condition of life, because It is a thing most earnestly desired by Christ and the Catholic Church.

Hence no one who is in the state of grace and who approaches the Holy Table with a right and devout intention can be lawfully hindered.

The decree defines a right intention as meaning that he who goes to Communion should do this, not because of routine or vainglory or human respect, but for the purpose of pleasing God, of being more closely united to Him by charity, and of seeking this Divine remedy for weaknesses and defects. Although the Church regards it as expedient that those who go to Communion daily should be free of venial sins, especially from such offenses as are wholly deliberate, and that there should be no affection for these sins, nevertheless it is sufficient if the persons be free of mortal sin and have the purpose of never sinning mortally in the future. "If they have this sincere purpose, it is impossible but that daily Communicants should gradually emancipate themselves even from venial sins, and from all affection thereto."

While the sacraments of the New Law produce their effects *ex opere operato* (i. e. by their own power, as a force coming into us from the outside, and not by our own feeling of devotion), nevertheless they produce a greater effect in proportion as the dispositions of the recipient are better; therefore Holy Communion should be preceded by serious preparation and followed by suitable thanksgiving, according to each one's strength, circumstances, and duties.

The father confessor's advice should be asked in order that frequent and daily Communion should be received with greater prudence and more abundant merit, but confessors are ordered by the Papal decree to be careful not to dissuade any one who is in the state of grace and approaches with the right intention.

Parish priests, confessors, and preachers are "frequently, and with great zeal, to exhort the faithful to this devout and salutary practice," since it is plain that by the frequent or daily reception of Communion "union with Christ is fostered, the spiritual life is more abundantly sustained, the soul more richly endowed with virtues, and an even surer pledge of everlasting happiness bestowed on the recipient."

The decree commands that frequent and daily Communion is to be promoted especially in the religious orders and congregations, in ecclesiastical seminaries, and in all Christian establishments, of whatever kind, for the training of youth.

Where the reception of Communion is assigned to certain days in the rules of religious communities, these days are to be directive, not preceptive, and the appointed number of Communions should be regarded as the minimum to be received, while daily Communion should be permitted.

The Pope forbade ecclesiastical writers to engage in contentious controversies about the dispositions requisite for frequent and daily Communion.

We can see from these regulations that the Church is strongly in favor of frequent or daily reception of the Blessed Eucharist and that all those who claim that the Sacrament is too holy or who have other specious excuses for opposing the practice are fighting Christ, not serving Him.

If we see somebody going to Communion daily and yet not coming up to our demands of what a daily receiver should be, let us meditate on Christ's warning in the Sermon on the Mount: "Judge not that you may not be judged. For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged; and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why seest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye; and seest not the beam that is in thy own eye?" (Matt. vii, 1-3.)

CHAPTER XXIX

THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES OF ST. IGNATIUS LOYOLA

By a spiritual exercise St. Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus, understood every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of disordered tendencies, and after having freed itself of these, each way of seeking and finding the Divine will as to the management of one's life, in order to save one's soul. Hence he listed under spiritual exercises examination of conscience, meditation, contemplation, vocal and mental prayer, and other similar actions.

The saint divided his exercises into four weeks, giving the first to considerations on the sins, the second to the life of our Lord up to Palm Sunday, the third to the Passion of our Lord, and the fourth to the Resurrection and Ascension, with three methods of prayer.

The **Catholic Encyclopedia** (Vol. vii, page 642) says of the Ignatian exercises: They "are written very concisely, in the form of a handbook for the priest who is to explain them, and it is practically impossible to describe them without making them,

just as it might be impossible to explain Nelson's 'Sailing Orders' to a man who knew nothing of ships or the sea. The idea of the work is to help the exercitant to find out what the will of God is in regard to his future, and to give him the energy and courage to follow that will. The exercitant (under ideal circumstances) is guided through four weeks of meditations: the first week on sin and its consequences, the second on Christ's life on earth, the third on His Passion, the fourth on His risen life; and a certain number of instructions (called 'rules,' 'additions,' 'notes') are added to teach him how to pray, how to avoid scruples, how to think with the Church, and, most important of all, how to elect a vocation in life without being swayed by the love of self or of the world. In their fullness they should, according to Ignatius' idea, ordinarily be made once or twice only; but in part (from three to eight days) they may be most profitably made annually, and are now commonly called 'retreats,' from the seclusion or retreat from the world in which the exercitant lives. . . . The stores of spiritual wisdom contained in the 'Book of Exercises' are truly astonishing, and their author is believed to have been inspired while drawing them up." The exercises were solemnly approved, at request of St. Francis Borgia, by Pope Paul III in the Brief *Pastoralis Officii* in 1548.

It is not my purpose to present the entire exercises, but I intend to give a fairly complete account

of the first week's program with a small part of the second week's, in order to indicate the method of Ignatius. Readers will find handy books with the complete exercises easily available.

The exercises, said Ignatius, should be entered with great courage and generosity towards God, to whom we should offer our will and liberty, that the Divine Majesty may make use of us according to His holy will.

The saint left a valuable group of rules to spiritual directors in charge of giving the exercises to others. These rules unquestionably have had much to do with the extraordinary success that has attended the retreat and mission work of the Jesuits.

Ignatius expected that the exercises would be used in a systematic way, with an hour or more given to them every day over a period of thirty days. The weeks, he left more or less flexible, according to the dispositions of the person making the exercises. Nevertheless, the fundamental spiritual philosophy of the Ignatian method is so sound and practicable that even for a short retreat the spiritual exercises are valuable.

As the principle and foundation of the first week's exercises, he reminded us that man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God, and by this means to save his soul. Everything else on earth is created to help man in attaining this end. From this it follows that man ought to use all other things only inasmuch

as they help him towards salvation, and to rid himself of them insofar as they hinder him from this end. Consequently, we ought to make ourselves indifferent to all created things in which we have the choice of free will; we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, long rather than short life, but should desire only what is conducive to the end for which we are created.

The first exercise Ignatius then presents to us is the particular and daily examen. The first examination of ourselves should come in the morning, when, immediately on rising, we should purpose to guard ourselves against a particular sin or defect that we have determined to correct. The second examination should come after dinner, when we should ask God for grace to remember how many times we have fallen into that particular defect and for strength to overcome it in the future. The saint suggests that we now go over our day hour by hour, commencing with the time when we arose, and jot down the number of times we have offended against the sin or fault we are determined to root out. Then let us resolve anew to evade it. After supper, he suggests, we should make another examination, covering hour by hour, from the time of the noon self-test up to the present one.

The saint suggested that a written record of the whole week be kept, for the sake of comparison. He also urged that each time we fall into the sin or de-

fect we are trying to avoid we put our hands to our breasts and grieve for having fallen. This, he says, can be done in the presence of many without their perceiving it.

From the particular examen, he goes into the general examination of conscience. To prepare for this, he analyzes how the soul falls into or repels sin. First he presupposes that we have three kinds of thoughts in us: one type is our own, which springs from our mere liberty and will; the two other types come from without, one from good spirits, one from bad.

There are two ways by which we can merit from bad thoughts. The first is to resist immediately a thought of committing mortal sin, this thought remaining conquered; the second is, when the same bad thought returns, again to resist it, and if it returns again, to resist further, until it is finally conquered. "The second way is more meritorious than the first."

A venial sin is committed, he warns, when the thought of sinning mortally comes and one gives ear to it, making some little delay, or receiving some sensual pleasure, or showing negligence in rejecting the thought.

There are two ways of sinning mortally in thought. The first is to give consent to the bad thought, with the determination of acting afterwards, or to think of it in such a way that one would commit the act now if one could. [To this might also be added the

taking of deliberate pleasure in thinking over a mortal sin committed in the past, having no sorrow for it.]

The second way of sinning mortally in thought is when the thought is put into act. This is a greater sin than the first, for three reasons: First, because greater time is spent in the sin; second, because the sin is more intense; third, because of the greater harm to the participant and possibly to two persons.

Avoidance of Sinning by Word

In his treatise on the examination of conscience, St. Ignatius discusses ways in which we can sin by word, and first deals with swearing.

He points out that we should not swear either by the Creator or a creature, unless our oath be marked by truth, necessity, and reverence. The necessity he demands is that the oath should be of some importance for the good of the soul or the body, or for the acquirement or protection of temporal goods. By demanding reverence, he means that in naming the Lord we should do it in such a way as to give God honor.

The saint points out that it is more difficult to swear with truth, necessity, and reverence if we swear by a creature than if we swear by the Creator. His reasons are that to swear by a creature would not make us so attentive to telling the truth as to swear

by God; that the former mode of swearing may not keep us as reverent toward God as the latter; and that continual swearing by a creature might lead the imperfect to idolatry.

Ignatius next deals with the fault of uttering idle words. "One must not speak an idle word. By an idle word I mean one which does not benefit me or another, and is not directed to that intention." Hence, he shows, words spoken for any useful end are not idle, "even if one were to speak of something foreign to one's state in life, as, for instance, if a religious speaks of wars or articles of trade." In all that we say, he shows, there is merit in directing our speech well, and sin in directing it badly.

Reading Ignatius and other saints about idle words, and remembering the Scriptural warning that for every idle word a man shall speak he shall render an account on the Day of Judgment, some may be inclined to grow scrupulous on the point. Unquestionably the type of conversation forbidden is that which is utterly vain and frivolous. Joking, if intended for decent recreation, is not sinful. But can those people who never seem to have a serious thought and whose every conversation is a babble of nonsense be excused from sin? Hardly!

Ignatius now goes on to remind us that nothing must be said to injure another's character or to find fault. If I reveal a mortal sin that is not public, I

sin mortally; if a venial sin, venially; if a defect, I show a defect of my own.

If I have a good intention, I am permitted in two ways to speak of the fault of another. The first is when the sin is public, as in the case of a prostitute, or there has been a sentence pronounced against the offender, or it is the case of a public error that is infecting souls with which I come in contact. The second way in which I am permitted to reveal sins or faults of another is when I do this for the purpose of raising the person to whom I am speaking out of sin; provided that I have probable grounds for believing that I can help him in this way.

[We might add another reason for divulging the evil of another—the desire for advice or consolation for ourselves when the evil is directed against us and when we do not carry the tale to more than one or two prudent persons].

The saint now advises us to examine ourselves as to the Ten Commandments, the Precepts of the Church, and the recommendations of superiors. There can be greater or lesser sins under all these three heads. By the recommendations of superiors, Ignatius means those pious acts recommended by the Popes or other superiors for the gaining of indulgences, and so forth. One commits no little sin, he declares, in being the cause of others' acting contrary to these pious exhortations.

The saint gives us the following method for a daily general examination of conscience:

First: Give thanks to God for benefits received.

Second: Ask the grace to know your sins and to cast them out.

Third: Call your soul to account from the hour of rising to the time of examination, hour by hour or period by period: first as to thoughts, second as to words, third as to acts.

Fourth: Ask the pardon of God for these faults.

Fifth: Form the purpose of amendment, with the aid of God's grace.

Close with the recitation of the Our Father.

Value of General Confession

St. Ignatius suggested that a person going through the spiritual exercises should make a general Confession. Although one might not actually need the general Confession, nevertheless several advantages would accrue from it. In the first place, it would give the penitent a greater actual sorrow for sin and for the wickedness of his whole life. In the second place, inasmuch as sin and its malice are understood more intimately during a period of spiritual exercising, more knowledge of and sorrow for them can be felt than at other times and hence greater profit

and merit can be obtained. In the third place, having made a better Confession and having become better disposed, the penitent finds himself better prepared to receive the Blessed Sacrament, which is a guard against falling into sin and a preserver of increased grace.

The saint suggested that this general Confession be made immediately after the exercises of the first week.

A Practical Method of Meditation

St. Ignatius gives us a practical method of meditation. He tells us first to make a preparatory prayer and to ask the grace of God that all our intentions, actions, and operations may be directed purely to the service and praise of His Divine Majesty.

Then he tells us to visualize some corporal place with Christ or Mary present: for instance, to see in our minds the Temple or Mountain where Jesus or Mary is found. But if the meditation should be on something like sin, the "composition" or picture we make in the imagination would be something like this: we should consider that our soul is imprisoned in a corruptible body, and is in a valley, exiled among brute beasts.

The next step is to ask God what we desire. If we are meditating on the Resurrection, we should ask for joy with the joyous Christ; if on the Passion,

we should ask for pain, tears, and torment with Christ in pain.

If our meditation or contemplation is on sin, we should here ask for shame and confession, inasmuch as many have been damned for only one mortal sin, whereas we probably deserved to be condemned many times for numerous sins.

Now the saint proceeds to make suggestions for the rest of the meditation, using sin as the subject. Readers, of course, know that the subjects for meditation are practically limitless. But they can learn the Ignatian method from this example.

As the first point of the actual meditation, Ignatius brings to memory the first sin, that of the angels. He turns the memory, intellect, and will on this sin, discussing it mentally with himself; and he compares this one sin of the angels with his own many sins, while he remembers that the angels were cast into hell for one. The angels were created in grace, but came to pride and changed from grace to malice; hence they were hurled into hell. Ignatius thinks over these things, and others that suggest themselves, and endeavors to move his feelings against sin with his will.

As the second point, he brings the memory, intellect, and will to bear on the sin of Adam and Eve. He recalls how long they did penance for this sin and how the human race was corrupted as a result of it, with the consequence that many souls were

damned. Ignatius reminds himself of Eden, the creation of Eve from a rib of Adam, the prohibition against eating fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, the eating and the sin, the expulsion of the now-clad first parents from paradise, their life spent minus the gifts they once enjoyed, their many labors and abundant penances. Ignatius goes into details on these and other facts of the first parents' sin, and uses his will to move his feelings in opposition to sin.

As the third point, he deals, in like fashion, with a particular sin that has sent some soul to hell. He thinks of the many who have been lost for fewer sins than he himself has committed. He brings to mind the gravity and malice of sin against one's Lord and Creator; he discusses, mentally, how, for sinning against the Infinite Goodness, a soul has been justly condemned forever; and, as in connection with the other points of the meditation, Ignatius moves his will against sin.

At the close, the saint has a colloquy. He imagines Christ the Lord present, hanging on the cross. He thinks of the Creator coming as man, Eternal Life suffering temporal death, dying "for my sins." Then Ignatius regards himself: What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I to do for Christ?

All the while, the saint sees His Master nailed to the cross. "And the colloquy is made . . . as one friend speaks to another, or as a servant to his mas-

ter; now asking some grace, now blaming one's self for some misdeed, now communicating one's affairs, now asking advice in them."

At the close, the saint says an Our Father.

This simple plan of meditation is practical and easily remembered. Ignatius made himself a great saint largely by meditation. As we have said before, a soul that is faithful to meditation is never lost.

Value of Humbling Ourselves in Order to Detest Sin

St. Ignatius has conferences on deep spiritual truths as one of the chief features of his program for moral regeneration. As usually carried out in retreats, these meditations are held five times a day, as follows: First at night, immediately before retiring; second, immediately on rising in the morning; third, some time in the morning before dinner; fourth, about two o'clock; fifth, an hour before supper.

In the first week of his exercises, the daily conferences or meditations deal with sin and its effects, the punishments a sinner really deserves for mortal offenses, our dependence on Divine help in gaining an interior knowledge and hatred of sin, and thoughts on damnation.

In all these, Ignatius expects the regular system of

meditation we have previously explained to be carried out.

After a preparatory prayer to ask God's grace that all our intentions, actions, and operations may be directed wholly to the service of the Divine Majesty, we should strive to form an imaginary picture of ourselves in Christ's presence or some other picture that will give definiteness to our thoughts. Then we should ask God for what we desire, such as sorrow for sin. Now we are ready for the actual meditation.

We should strive to bring to mind all the sins of our lives, looking at ourselves, in memory, from year to year, or period to period. To help us in this, it is well to remember the places and houses in which we have lived, the relations we have had with others, and the occupations we have had.

The second point in the meditation is to look at the foulness and malice that any mortal sin contains and to realize how foul it would be even if it were not forbidden.

The third point is to humiliate myself by comparisons. First, let me compare myself with other men and realize how much less than them I am; second, let me think of my lowliness in comparison with the angels and saints in paradise; third, let me think of the limitations of all creation in comparison with God, and then of myself alone in comparison with

Him; fourth, let me consider my own bodily corruption and foulness; fifth, let me "look at myself as a sore and ulcer, from which have sprung so many sins and so many iniquities, and such very vile poison."

The fourth point of the meditation is to consider what God is, against whom I have sinned, with a comparison of His attributes and their contraries in me—His wisdom with my ignorance, His omnipotence with my weakness, His justice with my iniquity, His goodness with my malice.

As the fifth point, the saint recommends a deep-felt exclamation of wonder as to why I have been left in life. The angels, although they are the sword of Divine justice, have endured me, guarded me, and prayed for me; the saints have interceded for me; "the heavens, sun, moon, stars, and elements, fruits, birds, fishes, and animals—and the earth, how it has not opened to swallow me up, creating new hells for me to suffer in them forever!"

After the soul has engaged in these thoughts, he suggests that it hold a colloquy of mercy with God, pondering and giving thanks to God that He has given it life up to now, and proposing amendment in the future, with the aid of His grace. The meditation comes to an end with an Our Father.

In this exercise, we should dwell on those points that have given us the greatest spiritual feeling in the first two meditations, whether this has been con-

solation or desolation. Then our souls should enter colloquies, the first with Our Lady, that she may obtain grace from her Divine Son for us to have an interior knowledge of our sins and hatred for them, that we may feel the disorder of our actions and detest them, so that we may put ourselves in order and that we may have that knowledge of the world which will make us hate it and cause us to put away worldly affairs and turn to Divine things. The second colloquy is with our Divine Lord and the Soul of Christ, asking Him to obtain these favors for us from His Father. The third is with the Father, that the Eternal Lord Himself may grant these requests to us.

The final exercise prescribed by St. Ignatius for the first week of his program is a meditation on hell. He would have us form a picture of hell in our imagination and then ask for an interior sense of the pain which the damned suffer, in order to have us guard against forgetting the love of the Eternal Lord or at least to have us fear the pains of hell.

He wishes us to picture great fires, with souls suffering there, and to hear the wailings, howlings, cries, and blasphemies against Christ and His saints. He would have us in imagination smell the smoke, sulphur, dregs, and putrid things; and taste the bitter things, such as the tears. He would have us imagine the torture of the sadness and the worm

of conscience. He would have us imagine how the fires agonize the captive souls.

Then, "making a colloquy with Christ our Lord, I will bring to memory the souls that are in hell, some because they did not believe in His coming, others because, believing, they did not act according to His commandments."

St. Ignatius Tells Why He Found Ascetic Practices of Great Value

At the close of his notes on the first week of his exercises, Ignatius gives valuable suggestions for asceticism. Among them we find remarks on ascetical practices in eating, sleeping, and the chastisement of the flesh. He declares that to leave off the superfluous in eating is not penance but temperance, and he urges penitential eating, the more the better, but always in such a way as to prevent physical injury and illness. As to sleeping, he recommends that what is superfluous be avoided, but again he warns that the penitent not injure his health. He says we should take what sleep is suitable, except when we are trying to reach a happy mean and are denying ourselves even below what is suitable in order to strengthen the body against demanding what is superfluous. By chastisement of the flesh, he means the self-infliction of sensible pain, "which is given by wearing haircloth or cords or iron chains next to the flesh, by scourg-

ing or wounding oneself, and by other kinds of austerity." But here again he warns against excess that might cause illness. "It appears to be more suitable to scourge oneself with thin cords, which give pain exteriorly, rather than in another way which would cause notable illness within."

He gives three reasons for these austerities: I. To satisfy for sins committed; II. To conquer oneself by making sensuality obey reason and making inferior parts subject to the superior; III. To secure some grace or gift, like penance for sin, sympathy with Our Lord in the Passion, or the settling of spiritual doubts.

St. Aloysius' Advice

At the close of our résumé of the first week of Ignatius' exercises, perhaps readers would appreciate the following thoughts from St. Aloysius Gonzaga, on this period of the Ignatian penitential method:

"The judgments of God are inscrutable. Who knows whether He has yet pardoned me the sins I committed in the world?

"Pillars of Heaven have fallen and been broken; who will promise me perseverance?

"The world lies buried at present in the depths of malice; who will appease the Omnipotent in His wrath?

"The greater number of religious men are forget-

ful of their vocation; how shall God any longer overlook such a loss to His Kingdom? The faithful, with great tepidity, are throughout their whole lives robbing God, as it were, of His glory, and who shall restore it to Him? Woe to worldlings, who defer their repentance till they are on the point of death! Woe also to religious, who have been sleeping until the same hour!

“By spurs such as these somnolence is to be driven off and the resolution of doing penance and of serving God rightly and determinedly is to be renewed.

“Genuine penance is conceived by great sorrow arising from the love of God, who has been treated by me with contempt and ignominy.

“The same spirit makes us so deplore mortal sin, that it excites in us the greatest compunction for all venial sins likewise.

“It goes so far, also, as not only to acknowledge and reverence God’s mercy in remitting sin, but, in order to do honour to Divine Justice, it most vehemently desires to undergo all the just penalty of its sins.

“Hence God infuses into the well-disposed a great hatred of themselves, by which the resolution of sharply punishing themselves by penances, even by those which are external, is excited and strengthened.” (*Spiritual and Literary Reliques of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, S.J., Part II, p. 15, Irish Messenger print, Dublin.*)

How to Meditate on Incidents in Life of Jesus Christ

St. Ignatius in the second week of his exercises presents a series of contemplations on the early life of our Lord. He begins with the Incarnation and has us imagine that the three Divine Persons look down on the circuit of all the world, full of men, and, seeing that all would otherwise go to hell, determine that the Second Person of the Trinity shall become man and save the human race. In the fullness of time, the Divine Persons send the Angel Gabriel to Our Lady to announce the Incarnation.

St. Ignatius would have us visualize the great capacity and circuit of the world, in which there are many people of many different types; and then the house and room at Nazareth, in which the angel appears to Mary.

He would also have us ask God for interior knowledge of the Lord, who has become man for us; this knowledge will make us love and follow Him.

The contemplation of the mystery of the Incarnation will be aided if we imagine the great variety of men on the face of the earth. There is great difference in their dress and actions. Some of these men are white and some are black; some are in peace, some in war; some are weeping, others, laughing;

some are well, some are ill; some are being born, others are dying.

We should also form a picture of the three Divine Persons, on the royal throne or seat of their Divine Majesty, looking down on the blindness of the people, on those who are dying, and the descent of many into hell.

Then we should form a picture of Our Lady and of the angel who is saluting her, and we should reflect over the meaning of this Annunciation to us.

Ignatius would have us imagine the conversation of the crowds of men on the earth; how they swear and blaspheme. And likewise, he would have us imagine the Divine Persons saying: "Let Us work the redemption of the human race." And then, he would have us ponder over the words of the angel Gabriel to the Blessed Virgin and her reply to this celestial messenger.

The people on the face of the earth are killing, committing other sins, and going to hell; the Divine Trinity is working out the most holy Incarnation; the angel is doing his duty as ambassador, while Our Lady is humbling herself and giving thanks to the Divine Majesty. We can draw profit from reflection on each of these things.

At the end of the contemplation, Ignatius urges, we should hold a colloquy with the three Divine Persons, with the Word Incarnate, or with Our Lady,

and ask for what we feel we need, in order that we may follow and imitate our incarnate Lord.

The Nativity of Our Lord

The next contemplation deals with the Nativity of Our Lord. The saint would have us visualize the Blessed Virgin, seated on an ass, on her way to Bethlehem, with Joseph "and a maid," to pay the tribute which Cæsar had imposed. He would have us form a definite picture of the road, whether it is level or through valleys or over hills; and he would also have us imagine a clear picture of the cave in which Christ was born, noting how large or how small it is, how low or how high, and how it is prepared.

Ignatius would have us see Our Lady and St. Joseph, the maid and, after the birth, Jesus Christ. Now I am to make myself a poor creature and an unworthy slave, who stands looking at the holy family and serving them in all their needs, with all possible respect and reverence, as if I were actually present. And then I should reflect on myself, in order to draw profit from my experience. I should mark what they are saying, think over it, and apply lessons to myself. I should think what they are doing; how the parents have taken this laborious journey, and how the Lord has been born in poverty; how He will hunger and thirst, suffer heat and cold, injuries

and affronts, and die on the cross. All this is for me. Reflecting over these facts, let me draw spiritual profit from them. And let me finish this contemplation with a colloquy, a conversation between myself and Him or one of the other sacred persons present.

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These brief pictures of the Ignatian Exercises are sufficient to show the tremendous spiritual value of the Jesuit system.

CHAPTER XXX

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT—AN EPITOME OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

The essentials of Christian perfection were given by our Divine Lord in His Sermon on the Mount, the greatest ascetic discourse ever delivered.

Jesus, going up a mountain to pray, spent the whole night conversing with God. When day had come, He called together His disciples and selected twelve of them, whom He called Apostles.

After this, He preached His great Sermon on the Mount to them and the multitudes, gathered a little lower down the mountain. Matthew's Gospel gives the more detailed account of this sermon; Luke's may be an abridged account or may be the report of a similar sermon given at another time. We are not sure. Christ began, according to Matthew, by giving the Eight Beatitudes:

1. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

2. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land.

3. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.

4. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall have their fill.

5. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

6. "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.

7. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.

8. "Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice's sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Kindly notice the following facts about these statements of Christ:

Not simply to the poor, but to the "poor in spirit," will the kingdom of heaven belong. The blessedness He praises lies in detachment from the goods of this world. Not to have these goods, but to desire them, is not to be poor in spirit. To have riches, but to remain detached from them, is to be poor in spirit. It is better for us if we lack both the goods and the desire, as Christ's whole life and frequent teachings proved.

By the meek we are not to understand those who have no fire at all in their make-up, but those who control themselves for Christ's sake. The land they will possess is understood as referring to heaven or to the new material heavens and new earth to come on the Day of Judgment.

The mourning that is called blessed has chiefly a spiritual meaning. It is had by those who mourn

for their own or others' offenses, out of love of God. In a lesser sense, other mourning is meant.

The fourth beatitude praises a strong and constant desire for progress in religious and moral perfection, the reward of which will be the fulfillment of the desire—continuous growth in justice. The desire is called hunger and thirst after justice. The beatitude also shows that those who are subjected to indignity and suffering, because they are denied justice, shall be made happy if, for God's sake, they patiently bear the wrong done.

The fifth beatitude praises those who are not merely just, but who go further and extend mercy. This beatitude also encourages us to be patient with our fellows.

The pure heart urged in the sixth beatitude is simple and sincere good intention, with particular love of chastity. One cannot please Christ if one wishes to sin and is kept from it merely by lack of opportunity.

The peacemakers referred to in the seventh beatitude not only keep peace themselves, but strive to maintain it between other men and between men and God.

The eighth beatitude promises the kingdom of heaven to those who are persecuted because of their faithfulness to the law of God and their own duty. The beatitudes throughout do not urge us to look for our reward in this life, but to expect it beyond.

The beatitudes get their name from the fact that they all start with the word "beati" (blessed) in Latin.

We will take up the rest of the Sermon on the Mount text by text, with short explanations of each text where the meaning is not obvious.

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt lose its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is good for nothing any more but to be cast out, and to be trodden on by men."

As salt preserves food from corruption, and helps it to keep its taste, so virtue seasons and preserves life. But if salt loses its savor, it is useless. So if the savor of virtue departs, our lives are useless. Christians should be examples of virtue to all.

"You are the light of the world. A city seated on a mountain cannot be hidden."

All Christians, and religious superiors especially, should be men of such virtue that their goodness will illuminate the world. One cannot hide a virtuous life, no matter how humble one is. Some commentators say that in this text Jesus renewed His mission to the Apostles, sending them out as the light-bearers to mankind. The Church of Christ is represented as a city on a mountain, to be seen by men in all time.

"Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but upon a candlestick, that it may shine to all that are in the house. So let your light shine

before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

Jesus wants His ministers to use the talents given to them and to make their own lives correspond with their teachings, that God may be honored and men may be saved. The Pharisees did their good works only for the praise they would get from men. The greater honor and glory of God should be the sole motive of the Christian. A good life always radiates glory all around it.

"Do not think I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill."

By "law" Jesus means here the five books of Moses; by "prophets," the other books of the Old Testament. Christ's doctrines do not destroy the Mosaic Law, but fulfill it. Christianity is the perfection of the Jewish religion, not something entirely new. Judaism was only a preparation for Christianity, and its lawful forerunner.

"For amen I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot, or one tittle shall not pass of the law, till all be fulfilled."

Never shall the smallest part of God's promises go without being fulfilled; rather than have this happen, heaven and earth would pass—but creation, to be renewed on the Day of Judgment, will remain forever.

"He therefore that shall break one of these least

commandments, and so teach men, shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. But he that shall do and teach, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

"Least in the kingdom of heaven" probably means those excluded from that realm.

"For I tell you, that unless your justice abound more than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

The scribes and Pharisees were hypocrites. They did many good deeds, but had wrong motives, and sought their own glory in the eyes of other men, not God's glory. Unrepentant hypocrites will be barred from heaven. We must give our interior self as well as our exterior to God.

"You have heard that it was said to them of old: Thou shalt not kill. And whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say to you, that whosoever is angry with his brother, shall be in danger of the judgment. And whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council. And whosoever shall say, thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire."

"In danger of the judgment" means liable to capital punishment. The scribes and Pharisees taught that the commandment not to kill referred to external acts, but Jesus warns that serious anger, without cause, is grievously sinful. Anger is a mortal sin only when wilfully and excessively indulged in, and exer-

cised in the way of unlawful vengeance that does or wishes serious injury to others. "Raca" is a term of contempt, implying that a person is foolish and empty-headed. "Fool" in the sense Christ used implied a charge of irreligion and signified an atheist, apostate, and so forth. It is very evident from these texts that we are not to set ourselves up as angry judges of our neighbors, with the desire to punish them with impunity and to insult them as if they were inferior beings.

'If therefore thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there remember that thy brother hath anything against thee, leave there thy offering before the altar, and go first to be reconciled to thy brother: and then coming thou shalt offer thy gift.'

If we are the offenders in an altercation with another, we must try to set matters right so far as prudence and circumstances allow, before we can expect to be set right with God. If we have been offended, it is sufficient if we forgive the offender in our hearts, and be willing to accept the explanation he offers. A Christian is not allowed to persist in a grudge. Christ makes this plain when He goes on: "Be at agreement with thy adversary betimes, whilst thou art in the way with him: lest perhaps the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Amen I say to thee, thou shalt not go out from thence till thou repay the last farthing."

By the words "in the way," Christ meant this life. It is plain that the text then goes on to show what will happen to us after this life. If we are in mortal sin, the "last farthing" means eternal damnation, for Scripture says that hell never ends. But if we are in venial sin, we must be cleansed in purgatory. The text cannot be explained unless we admit a purgatory. It is evident that some will repay and come out of the prison; but what prison can it be if nothing but an eternal hell is admitted, since from hell there is no redemption?

Jesus went on: "You have heard that it was said to them of old: Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say to you, that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Christ here again condemns the Pharisees, who taught that only external sins were blameworthy. The world is full of Pharisees today. St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that complete internal sin is not specifically distinct nor different from the external sin. The external act adds increased malice to the internal sin by intensifying it, prolonging it, often by giving scandal, and by increasing the number of internal acts; but it does not change the species or nature of the internal sin. (Father C. J. Callan's **Commentary on the Four Gospels.**)

"And if thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee. For it is expedient for thee

that one of thy members should perish, rather than that thy whole body be cast into hell. And if thy right hand scandalize thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee; for it is expedient for thee that one of thy members should perish, rather than that thy whole body go into hell."

These words about parts of the body are not to be understood literally. The warning is against near occasions of sin. Christ wishes us to know that if we have something very dear and highly useful that is dragging us to hell, we should get rid of it rather than suffer damnation.

"And it hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a bill of divorce. But I say to you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, excepting for the cause of fornication, maketh her to commit adultery: and he that shall marry her that is put away, committeth adultery."

The Jews were permitted to divorce and remarry. But true consummated Christian marriage cannot be dissolved by either State or Church. If any person puts away his or her spouse for a trivial reason, and the spouse commits adultery, the person putting him or her away becomes guilty of the adultery as well as the one committing it. Fornication is mentioned as a just cause for the innocent party to put away a spouse because it is the chief reason making it allowable. Other causes, however, make separation without remarriage permissible, such as danger to

spiritual or temporal welfare, constant disagreement, etc. But such a separation is not a divorce in the sense understood today in courts of law. Christ very distinctly declares that a person who marries a divorcee commits adultery. The Catholic stand on marriage and divorce is exactly Christ's stand.

This text, if closely studied, especially in connection with other texts on divorce, gives no ground for allowing the innocent parties in marriages broken up by adultery to remarry. It merely allows separation. The phrase, "excepting for the cause of fornication," is restricted to the first clause of the sentence beginning, "But I say to you," and has no reference to the second.

"Again you have heard that it was said to them of old, Thou shalt not forswear thyself; but thou shalt perform thy oaths to the Lord. But I say to you not to swear at all, neither by heaven, for it is the throne of God; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King; neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your speech be yea, yea; no, no; and that which is over and above these, is of evil."

Jesus here first reminded His auditors, as pointed out in Exod. xx, 7; Lev. xix, 12; Deut. v, 11; xxiii, 21, that we must fulfill our promissory oaths made to God. The rest of the warning is not a pro-

hibition against swearing altogether, as some non-Catholics assume, but forbids useless swearing. It is sinful, Christ here shows us, to swear either by God or creatures when the oath is a trivial thing. Slater's **Manual of Moral Theology**, vol. i, page 241, says: "If the requisite conditions be fulfilled, oaths are lawful, and indeed they are an act of Divine worship, for they are an acknowledgment of the omniscience and veracity of God, as well as a public profession of belief in Him. This has been the constant teaching of the Church, teaching which has ample warrant in both the Old and New Testaments. The prophet Jeremias lays down the conditions which justify an oath, and many instances of oaths are found in the Epistles of the Apostle of the Gentiles. The words of our Lord (Matt. v, 34) do not prohibit the taking of oaths, if the requisite conditions be present. They give expression to His desire that all Christians should be so truthful and sincere that it will not be necessary for them to use oaths to confirm the truth of what they assert. The conditions which make an oath lawful are given in the words of Jeremias (Jer. iv, 2): 'And thou shalt swear, as the Lord liveth, in truth, and in judgment, and in justice.'"

Jesus' saying in this instance, like all others, must be gauged in its relation to the rest of the Bible. Other texts about swearing must be studied, before we can come to the true meaning of this one. It seems

to me, however, that Christ did forbid all swearing to those who actually heard Him, possibly because they were especially prone to the practice.

"You have heard that it hath been said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you not to resist evil; but if one strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the other."

The Jewish code of law was not as forgiving as the Christian. "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot," was laid down in Exodus xxi, 24, and "Breach for breach, eye for eye. What blemish he gave the like shall he be compelled to suffer," in Lev. xxiv, 20. But the Christian law is far less stringent. We are not supposed to resist evil-doers, more than our office, God's honor, or the good of our neighbor demands. "Rather than seriously offend charity and lose our peace of mind," says Father Charles J. Callan's **Commentary on the Four Gospels**, "we must be willing to forfeit some of our possessions and to incur not a little inconvenience."

We continue with the Sermon:

"And if a man will contend with thee in judgment, and take away thy coat, let go thy cloak also unto him.

"And whosoever will force thee one mile, go with him other two."

This emphasizes what Jesus taught above—that we must not resist those injuring us to the extent of go-

ing against charity ourselves. Christianity is a religion of love, and sways by kindness.

"Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not away."

We must help even those who have injured us, insofar as we can. This is one of the teachings that made Jesus so beloved that not a single widespread false religion established since His day has been able to keep Him altogether out of itself.

"You have heard that it hath been said, thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thy enemy. But I say to you, Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you; that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven, who maketh His sun to rise upon the good, and bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust. For if you love them that love you, what reward shall you have? do not even the publicans this? And if you salute your brethren only, what do you more? do not also the heathens this?"

Comment on these texts is almost superfluous, so plain are they. Rarely were the dogs of hate running wilder than they are in the world today, and never were Christ's words more needed.

"Be ye therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect."

This text refers to all virtues, but chiefly to mercy and charity, about which Christ has already spoken so much in the Sermon.

"Take heed that you do not do your justice before men, to be seen by them: otherwise you shall not have a reward of your Father who is in heaven."

The word "justice" here refers to observance of the whole law. Christ was constantly condemning the following of religion merely for show before other men.

"And when you are praying, speak not much, as the heathens. For they think that in their much speaking they may be heard."

This is not a condemnation of spending long periods in prayer, nor of repeating the same prayers, for Christ did both of these things Himself, as we know from the Bible. But it is a condemnation of the foolish pagan practice of trying to instruct deities by senseless repetition of the same word, flowery rhetorical arguments, and so on. The idea was to provoke the gods into an answer.

"Be ye not therefore like to them," went on Christ, "for your Father knoweth what is needful for you, before you ask Him."

"And when ye pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites, that love to stand and pray in the synagogues and corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men: Amen I say to you, they have received their reward. But thou when thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret: and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee."

The reference here is to our private prayers, not to public praying in church; but even in public prayers we should close the doors of our hearts to external distractions, and humbly beseech our God, never praying merely for show.

"Therefore, when thou dost an almsdeed, sound not a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Amen I say to you, they have received their reward. But when thou dost alms-deeds, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth. That thy alms may be in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee."

Today, just as the days of Christ, there are scores of persons who do not perform their deeds of charity in order that they may honor God, but that they may gain honor among their fellows. Christ warns that this is all the reward they will get. It is not always possible to do our charity in secret, but when it is we should allow nobody to know it, if we want to follow the path of Christian perfection.

"Thus therefore shalt you pray. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our supersubstantial bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation. But deliver us from evil. Amen."

The Lord's prayer begins by praying that the chief

end of creation, the glorification of God, shall be accomplished. God could not bring about creation for any reason outside Himself, or He would be dependent in some way on creatures, which is impossible. The reason why He created us, therefore, was that we might glorify Him. This explains why we have intelligence. If there were not our intelligence crowning creation, creation itself would have been impossible. If we refuse glory to God, we defeat the end of creation, and it is absolutely necessary for something to be done to us that will make us give honor to God, even though unwillingly. To assert, therefore, that the wicked will not be punished violates reason.

When we say, "Thy kingdom come," we pray that God may exercise His supreme dominion over all His creatures, and especially that His grace may reign in all hearts.

"Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," is a petition that God's will, as expressed in the teachings of His Church, may be as closely obeyed on earth as it is in heaven.

"Give us this day our supersubstantial bread" is a prayer for the things necessary each day to keep us alive. Both the rich and the poor need to say it, for there is no security in earthly wealth. The word supersubstantial means just the same as "daily," the word used in the most common form of the Lord's

Prayer. The petition is supposed to be renewed at least every twenty-four hours. Christ does not want us to bother about the morrow in this life to such an extent that we will neglect our souls. Some saints have referred the words "daily bread" chiefly to daily Communion.

"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors," or "And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us"—these words remind us that Christianity does not permit holding of grudges. We must be prepared to forgive, or we will get no forgiveness ourselves.

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen." Temptation is sometimes an allurements to sin; God never leads us into this, but He permits the world, the flesh, and the devil to do so, having given us strength enough to resist if we wish. By resisting, we gain new strength. We ask God in this petition to deliver us from this allurements or at least to prevent our yielding. Temptation is also at times a trial or test of fidelity. God is often the author of this type of temptation, as is shown in Gen. xxii, Deut. xiii, Ps. xxv. The evil from which we ask God to deliver us refers to evil in general—physical, spiritual, temporal, or eternal.

Amen means "So be it," indicating approval of all that has gone before.

"For if you will forgive men their offenses, your

heavenly Father will forgive you also your offenses. But if you will not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive you your offenses."

The world needs to take this lesson to heart today. Half of its troubles are directly traceable to uncontrolled hate.

"And when you fast, be not as the hypocrites, sad. For they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Amen I say to you, they have received their reward."

Jesus had previously warned against vain show in alms-deeds and prayers; now He utters the same kind of a warning in regard to acts of mortification. If we do these things for earthly glory, the little earthly glory that comes will be all we will get.

"But thou when thou fastest, anoint thy head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not to men to fast, but to thy Father who is in secret: and thy Father who seeth in secret, will repay thee."

The Jews, when about to feast, washed their faces and anointed their heads. Jesus' words are to be taken metaphorically. He urges us to seem glad when we mortify ourselves, in order that others will not know that we are doing penance; and He promises a reward for this spirit.

"Lay not up to yourselves treasure on earth: where the rust, and moth consume, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up to yourselves treasures

in heaven : where neither the rust nor moth doth consume, and where thieves do not break through, nor steal. For where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also." Comment on this is unnecessary.

"The light of thy body is thy eye. If thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be lightsome. But if thy eye be evil, thy whole body shall be darksome. If then the light that is in thee, be darkness : the darkness itself, how great shall it be."

As the eye is to the body, so the motive or intention is to the soul. If the motive is heavenly, the whole soul will be lighted. If the motive is earthly and dark, how great will the darkness of the soul be !

"No man can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one, and love the other : or he will sustain the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

Mammon here means an attachment to worldly goods. The word was the name of the Syrian God of riches ; hence it came to stand for worldliness personified.

"Judge not that you may not be judged."

Rash judgment is here forbidden by Christ, as it was forbidden in the eighth commandment. When sins are manifest, judgment of them is not rash.

"For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged ; and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why seest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye ; and seest not the

beam that is in thy own eye? Or how sayest thou to thy brother: Let me cast the mote out of thy eye; and behold a beam is in thy own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thy own eye, and then shalt thou see to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."

Mote and beam mean, respectively, small and large pieces of wood. The terms are used here in a figurative sense, to designate small and large sins. We are told to start our reformation of our fellows by reforming ourselves. The next time we feel terribly disturbed over something our neighbor has done, let us ask ourselves whether we would enjoy having a spotlight thrown on every single moment of our own lives.

"Give not that which is holy to dogs; neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest perhaps they trample them under their feet, and turning upon you, they tear you."

Christ means that we are not to expose the precious teachings of our faith and its holy mysteries to the danger of being profaned by sinful men.

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened."

We need God's constant help, and Christ here recommends frequent, persevering prayer, promising that it will not go unheard.

“Or what man is there among you, of whom if his son shall ask bread, will he reach him a stone? or if he shall ask him a fish, will he reach him a serpent? If you then being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven, give good things to them that ask Him?”

“All things, therefore, whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you also to them. For this is the law and the prophets. Enter ye in at the narrow gate, for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat. How narrow is the gate, and how strait is the way that leadeth to life: and few there are that find it!”

Christ here seems plainly to state that the majority are lost. St. Thomas Aquinas and many other authorities hold that the majority of mankind will not be saved. But the weight of opinion holds that the majority of Christians will probably be saved. Likewise many great theologians of today hold that the majority of mankind will escape hell. Christ here may have meant only that few Jews of His own time would be saved.

The complaint is sometimes made that the Catholic Church is too hard. Especially is this charge flung when her children want to enter marriages that she forbids. But Christ Himself shows that the path to heaven is not an easy one.

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly they are ravening wolves."

Here the reference is to false teachers—heretics and schismatics. Externally, they look like sheep, i. e. as if they are orthodox; but inwardly they are false. Luther, Calvin, Mary Baker Eddy, Joseph Smith, and all other false teachers pretending to have the only pure Christianity but rejecting the Church are in this class.

"By their fruits you shall know them. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"

The utter absence, in Protestantism, of persons whom the people, by their own universal acknowledgment, have declared saints, proves this. St. Anthony of Padua, St. Gabriel of the Passion, St. Teresa (the Little Flower of Jesus), and various other Catholics, on the other hand, were canonized within a short time after death because everybody realized that they were saints. Anthony's own mother saw her son raised to the altar as a saint; St. Gabriel's brother was present at his canonization; St. Teresa had sisters living at the time of hers.

Many non-Catholics lead surprisingly good lives, but it is because of the Catholicity they unwittingly possess. Where their positive non-Catholic doctrines come into play, as in self-interpretation of the Bible, belief in divorce, etc., we see them bearing fruits which are a constant scandal even in their own ranks.

“Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, and the evil tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can an evil tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be cut down, and shall be cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”

Every teacher of good doctrine, who lives or tries to live up to it, is bound to bring forth good fruit. Evil doers in general, and also teachers in particular, are to be punished in eternal fire, unless they die repentant.

“Not every one that saith to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of My Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Not every one who teaches about Christ, or belongs to His visible Church, will be saved. Faith is not enough. It is also necessary to be obedient to the teachings of the Church.

“Many will say to Me in that day: Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and cast out devils in Thy name, and done many miracles in Thy name? And then I will profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you that work iniquity.”

By the words “in that day” Jesus means the Day of General Judgment, when many false teachers, and many true teachers who have led sinful lives, will appeal to Him for eternal life, in view of having

taught about Him. But He warns that their iniquity will find its punishment, despite their teachings.

“Every one therefore that heareth these, My words, and doeth them, shall be likened to a wise man that built his house upon a rock, and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and they beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded on a rock. And every one that heareth these, My words, and doth them not, shall be like a foolish man that built his house upon the sand, and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and they beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall thereof.”

After Jesus had finished the Sermon on the Mount, the people were in admiration at His doctrine, for He taught as one having power, one who was giving His own teachings, not interpreting those of another, like the scribes and Pharisees.

Luke vi reports a sermon very much like that given in Matthew and known as the Sermon on the Mount. Perhaps the two evangelists were reporting the same discourse. We will present the sermon from Luke, in Christ's words, allowing our readers who have followed this series of comments to reach their interpretation through the previous remarks that deal with Mathew's sermon :

“Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that hunger now, for you shall

be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed shall you be when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. Be glad in that day and rejoice; for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For according to these things did their fathers to the prophets. But woe to you that are rich; for you have your consolation. Woe to you that are filled; for you shall hunger. Woe to you that now laugh; for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when men shall bless you; for according to these things did their fathers to the false prophets.

“But I say to you that hear: Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you. Bless them that curse you, and pray for them that calumniate you. And to him that striketh thee on the one cheek, offer also the other. And him that taketh away from thee thy cloak, forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every one that asketh thee, and of him that taketh away thy goods, ask them not again. And as you would that men should do to you, do you also to them in like manner. And if you love them that love you, what thanks are to you? for sinners also love those that love them. And if you do good to them who do good to you, what thanks are to you? for sinners also do this. And if you lend to them of whom you hope to receive, what thanks are to you? for sinners also lend to sinners, for to receive as much. But love ye your

enemies; and your reward shall be great, and you shall be sons of the Highest; for He is kind to the unthankful, and to the evil.

“Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you shall be forgiven. Give, and it shall be given to you; good measure and pressed down and shaken together and running over shall they give into your bosom. For with the same measure that you shall mete withal, it shall be measured to you again.”

Jesus then spoke a similitude, saying: “Can the blind lead the blind? do they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master; but every one shall be perfect, if he be as his master. And why seest thou the mote in thy brother’s eye; but the beam that is in thy own eye thou considerest not? Or how canst thou say to thy brother: Brother, let me pull the mote out of thy eye, when thou thyself seest not the beam in thy own eye? Hypocrite, cast first the beam out of thy own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to take out the mote from thy brother’s eye.

“For there is no good tree that bringeth forth evil fruit; nor an evil tree that bringeth forth good fruit. For every tree is known by its fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns; nor from a bramble bush do they gather the grape. A good man out

of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth that which is evil. For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

“And why call Me, Lord, Lord; and do not the things which I say? Every one that cometh to Me, and heareth My words, and doth them, I will show you to whom He is like. He is like to a man building a house, who digged deep, and laid the foundation upon a rock. And when a flood came, the stream beat vehemently upon that house and it could not shake it, for it was founded on a rock. But he that heareth, and doth not, is like to a man building his house upon the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently, and immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.”

In reading the Sermon on the Mount, we must remember the distinction between counsels and precepts. Jesus Christ, for instance, did not teach that every rich man would be damned, as might be judged if we took everything in the sermon as a command absolutely necessary for salvation. Joseph of Arimathea and other disciples of Jesus are known to have been well-to-do. But Christ did counsel poverty for His sake, and He did counsel the widest charity, and absolute meekness in physical attacks; and the more fully we adhere to these counsels, the higher we will go in heaven. The reason why Francis of

Assisi became the greatest religious reformer the Christian world has ever known next to Christ Himself was because He so literally followed the counsels, as well as the commands, of Jesus. The holier a man is, the more counsels of Christ he keeps. The easiest way to keep these counsels is to join a religious order.

CHAPTER XXXI

SUMMARY

In conclusion, let us summarize the facts with which we have dealt.

We showed, in the first place, that the Church teaches us the way to perfection through her ascetical theology. So long as we are on earth, perfection is not to be considered the attainment of absolute virtue, but constant progress towards it.

We saw that there are splendid dogmatic reasons behind the practice of ascetics; that grace adds to our being.

We found that the supernatural is built upon the natural, and that it behooves us to develop our natural powers, particularly by the formation of strong will power and the creation of new habits.

We saw that frequent prayer and daily examination of conscience are necessary to perfection, and that Christ particularly dwelt upon the value of persistency in prayer.

We discovered that the practice of self-denial makes man master over his lower-self and that St. Paul's doctrine about mortification proves it of immense value in spiritual growth.

We saw that the loss of chastity may be repaired through mortification and we investigated definite ascetic and scientific rules to aid in this recovery.

We proved the value of both physical and mental work for the upbuilding of spirituality and we gave the seventy-three rules of St. Benedict for attaining high soul-growth.

We studied the method of St. Benedict for the development of humility and the advice of St. Teresa of Spain about the avoidance of false humility.

We considered St. Francis de Sales' plan of meditation and his admonition that we should seek the humble virtues, not visions nor ecstasies.

We found that the modern ideal of spiritual perfection is a mild but sure growth in holiness and that it is better to leave the violence of the old-time cenobite practices to those heroic souls who tower above ordinary humanity.

We saw that daily examination of conscience will keep us from drinking down sin like water, and we studied the practice of recollection and the avoidance of distractions in prayer.

We showed that desolation of soul, which bothers so many good people, is a test that God gives to even the greatest saints, and we studied scrupulousness, a severe disease of the spirit, and gave practical plans for overcoming it.

We then took up faith, hope, and charity, and prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude. We

showed that an act of perfect love of God wipes the soul clean of mortal sin.

We studied the promises made by the Sacred Heart of Jesus to St. Margaret Mary of Alacoque, and then briefly dwelt on the glories of Mary, the Mother of God, our chief hope of mercy before the throne of her Son, our Mediator.

We saw what conditions Pius X laid down for daily Communion, and we finally studied the exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola and that greatest of all ascetic treatises, the Sermon on the Mount.

May God be good to you and me, and may He give us strength and courage to take advantage of the lessons here gathered together from the science of the saints!

THE END

INDEX

- Abandonment of Christ, 89
 "At the Feet of the Divine Master," 75
 Active religious life, 73, sqq.
 Actual grace, 9
 Aloysius, St., 153, 154
 Alphonsus, St., 37, sqq., 47
 Angela of Foglino, 92
 Anger, 164, 165
 "Armory of Holy Scripture," 114
 Ascetics, Definition of, 1
 Atonement, 34
 Augustine, St., 35, 36

 Beads, Plenary indulgence on, 20
 Bellarmine, 37
 Beatitudes, 159, sqq.
 Benedict XV, 74
 Benedict, St., 44
 Benedict, Rules of St., 48, sqq.
 Black Plague, 45
 Blessed Virgin Mary, 126, sqq.
 Book of Wisdom, 114, 117

 Callan, Rev. C. J., 166, 170
 Canonical Office, 87
 Cardinal virtues, 114
 "Catechism of the Summa," 107
 "Catholic Encyclopedia," 87
 Charity, 109, sqq.

 Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, 62
 Colloquy, 147
 Confession for scrupulous persons, 97
 Conscience, Examination of, 22, 79, 140, 144
 "Conquest of Heaven," 119
 Contemplative life, 73, sqq.
 Converts and Confession, 80
 Coué, Emile, 15

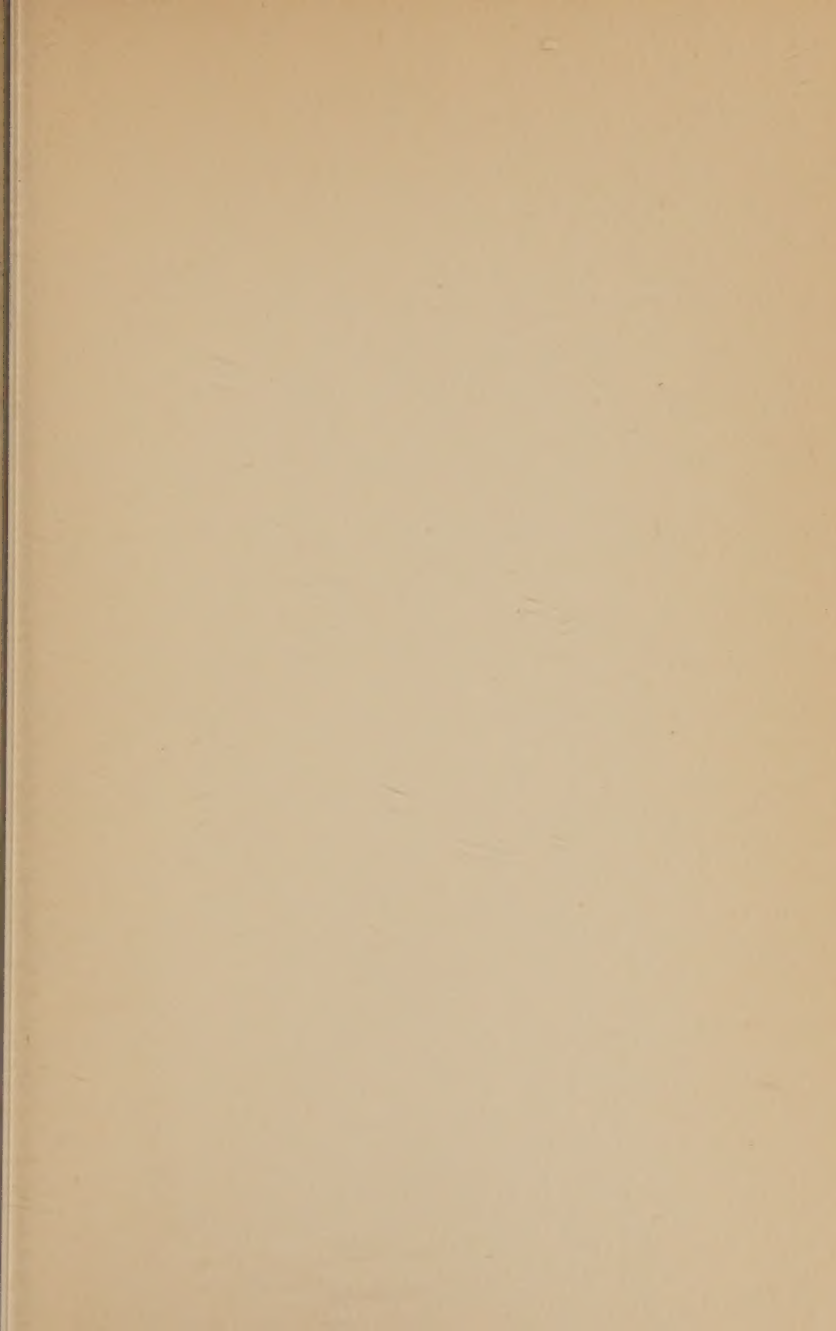
 Daily examination of conscience, 144
 David, 34
 Degrees of love, 110
 DeHarbe's "Catechism," 100
 Despair, 106
 Desolation of soul, 89
 "Devil's Thoughts," 62
 Diets for cure of impurity, 40, sqq.
 Difficulty in prayer, 15
 Dignity of mankind, 6, sqq.
 Discalced Carmelites, 76
 Distraction in prayer, 86, sqq.
 Divorce, 167, sqq.

 Ecstasies, 68
 "Exposition of Christian Doctrine," 95, 96
 Eye for eye, 170

 Faith, 100, sqq.
 Filial fear, 106

- Fools, 164
 Fortitude, 116
 False humility, 59, sqq.
 Fasting, 77, 78
 Fernandez, 74
 Francis of Assisi, St., 91, 92, 186
 Francis Borgia, St., 137
 Francis de Sales, St., 45, 63, 70, 73, 77, 92, 93
 Frequent Communion, 132, sqq.
 General Confession, 144
 General examination of conscience, 140
 "Glories of Mary," 39
 Grace, 7, sqq.
 Habits, 12, sqq.
 Hell, Meditation on, 151
 Hope, 105, sqq.
 How to know we love God, 111
 Humble virtues, 68, sqq.
 Humility, 53, 148
 Humility, Degrees of, 55, sqq.
 Huonder, 75
 Idle words, 142
 Impurity, Cures for, 37, sqq.; 40, sqq.
 "Introduction to a Devout Life," 63
 Ignatius Loyola, St., 136, sqq.
 Jackson, Helen Hunt, 25
 John, St., 80, 111, 129
 John, St., on Charity, 86
 Joseph, St., 45
 Justice, 115
 Lax conscience, 96
 Life of Christ, How to meditate on, 155
 Little Flower, 91, 92
 Lord's Prayer, 173, sqq.
 Loss of faith, 103
 Love of neighbor, 111, sqq.
 Luke VI Sermon by Christ, 182, sqq.
 Major, Clare Tree, 13
 Mary, Sufferings of, 89, 90
 Manifestation of conscience, to superiors, 56, 57
 Margaret Mary, St., 123
 Meditation, Plan of St. Francis de Sales, 63, sqq.
 Meditation, Plan of St. Ignatius, 145, sqq.
 Mental work, 45, sqq.
 Mortification, 29, 31, sqq.
 Mortification, Reasons for, 36, sqq.
 Mosaic Law, 163
 Mortal sins by thought, 140, 141
 Nathan, 34
 Nativity of Our Lord, 157
 Naval, Francisco, 74
 Night of the soul, 92
 Non-Catholics of clean life, 82
 Obedience, 53
 Original sin, 2, 3, 4
 Particular examen, 139
 Passions, 27, sqq.
 Paul, St., 32, 33, 34, 45, 94, 102, 111
 Paula, St., 75

- Paul III, 137
- Perfect charity, 118, sqq.
- Perfect contrition, 120, 121
- "Philothea," 63, 68, 71, 75, 77, 93
- Pius X, 119
- Pius X's Decree on Frequent Communion 132, sqq.
- Pius XI, 63
- Prayer, Ordinary practice of, 20, sqq.
- Presumption, 106
- Promises of Sacred Heart, 123, sqq.
- Pyne, Rev. John X., 14
- "Ramona," 25
- Recollection, 84, sqq.
- Reformation, 45
- Reserve in speech, 54
- Rouvier, 119, 120, 121
- Sabetti-Barrett, 21
- Scrupulousness, 95, sqq.
- Self-love, 112
- Sermon on Mount, 135, 159, sqq.
- Servile fear, 107
- Sin by word, 141
- Sacred Heart, 123
- Self-denial, 3
- Slater's Theology, 169
- Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, 136, sqq.
- Swearing, 141, 168, 169
- Temperance, 114, sqq.
- Teresa of Lisieux, St., 91, 92, 180
- Teresa of Spain, St., 59, sqq.; 70
- Thomas Aquinas, St., 27, 74, 100, 110, 114, 179
- Value of ascetics, Ignatian doctrine, 152, 153
- Vaughan, Rev. Kenelm, 114
- Vocations, 72
- Will power, 12, sqq.
- Wisdom, 114





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